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BETWEEN TWO OPINIONS.

VOL. II.

BETWEEN TWO OPINIONS

BY

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'A MOORLAND IDYL,' 'A VILLAGE HAMPDEN,' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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CONTENTS

OF

THE SECOND VOLUME.

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. DIALL'S OPINION	1
II. AT BAY	35
III. PEACE AND GOOD-WILL	62
IV. 'THE QUEST'	100
V. IMPRESSIONS	121
VI. LIGHT AND SHADE	153
VII. BARBARA'S ADVICE	177
VIII. EFFECTS	206
IX. DEAD LEAVES	234
X. DIALL MOVES	263

BETWEEN TWO OPINIONS.

CHAPTER I.

DIALL'S OPINION.

ON the second day after Rowe's posting his letter, in the evening, amongst the passengers who alighted upon the Knapstone platform from the London train, was a tall, substantially-built gentleman, wearing an ulster and carrying an umbrella and hand-bag. There was nothing to distinguish him from any other traveller of average^e respectability until he had left the

station. When he was in the road leading to the main portion of the little market-town, he stopped, and throwing his shoulders back, he inhaled, with obvious satisfaction, a deep draught of the clear twilight atmosphere about him ; after this he went forward again leisurely.

It was a cloudless, frosty evening, the chimney-pots of the town rising clear against the sky, and lights in the High Street just becoming visible. The air of quietude which invested this old-world town was peculiarly agreeable to the visitor we have noticed, and, as the clock of the parish church struck five, he again stood still to listen and to count the strokes.

‘The chimes at six,’ he muttered, with a sense of disappointment, and in walking on, noticed a man with a wooden leg just

passing him on the pavement. He seemed to pay attention to the fact, and immediately accelerated his own pace so as to keep within a few steps of the halting figure before him. Presently this latter turned into a narrow by-street, and the other turned also.

Mr. Jephcott was closing his shop door behind him, when he was aware of a hand placed upon it without. With his well-known courtesy, the antiquary hastened to repair the incivility, and with proper dignity begged his visitor to enter. The two eyed each other in the gas-light, and the younger smiled.

‘ You don’t remember me, Mr. Jephcott.’

‘ Not? Then I were unworthy of your acquaintance, Mr. Diall. A hearty greeting to you, sir,’ said the old man, grasping

the hand which Diall held out to him. 'Many and many a hearty greeting, my very dear sir.'

The expressive blue eyes of the genial antiquary were instantly alight and fixed in friendly scrutiny upon the other's face, the hand being still retained paternally.

'Have you had tea?' asked Roger, presently. 'I thought not. Then I am in time to join you. I want a talk.'

Rowe's disclosure had aroused in his Chelsea friend a more ugly form of interest than, in the narrating, the former had the slightest reason to suspect. Delay in acting upon such a piece of information was impossible even to one of acknowledged tardiness in execution, hence Diall's presence in Knapstone to-day. It was about five years since he had been there.

They had not sat long at the tea-table before the sinister matter was broached. The antiquary was wrathful against Rowe for his breach of compact, but an explanation of the peculiar circumstances of the case partially appeased him.

‘And do you mean to tell me, Mr. Jephcott,’ exclaimed Diall, warmly, ‘that you would not have disclosed the matter to me? That you would have allowed this scandalous iniquity to remain unredressed, to brood like a hell-cloud upon our family?’

‘Under the circumstances I should, sir, for restitution is impossible. Mr. Winnett is on the verge of the precipice himself, and to burden other than the direct line is, to my mind, wholly unjustifiable.’

‘Bah!’ exclaimed Diall, impatiently.

‘The curse must affect the breed, root and branch, so why such superfine distinctions? The thing must, of course, be grappled with instantly. Is this indeed my uncle’s position?’

‘Upon unmistakable authority. His downfall is imminent.’

In the course of the evening, Roger wrote and posted a note to Barbara, requesting her attendance at the ‘Swan’ the following morning as soon as she could get there. That being dispatched, and Diall’s mind fully made up, he spent a comparatively calm time amidst Mr. Jephcott’s fascinating collections of local matter.

It was nine o’clock before the letters were received at Murcott; nevertheless, Barbara reached the Swan Hotel before

ten. Her cousin's dispatch had caused her unmitigated astonishment, nor indeed only that. One construction alone was she able to place upon it, and that, she was piqued to find, had power to cause her an unfamiliar tremor.

Roger was in the coffee-room at breakfast when Barbara arrived there, alone. She went there first without inquiry, expecting it so. Proud she had been on the journey, resolved to act with strict propriety the part which *he* had so flagrantly thrust upon her; but now as she opened the door, and looked in upon the large table clothed in white, at one end of which sat a single human being in the act of raising an egg-spoon to his lips, she felt too much of her dignity go out from her. Her heart leaped at the sight of him,

and she laughed from sheer careless gladness.

‘So here you are!’ she cried, stepping forward, all her face aglow.

In hastily rising the man overturned his chair, and, brushing his lips lightly with his serviette, he came towards her.

‘Well, Barbara, once again;’ and he took her hand in both of his.

The absurdity of confessions revoked, whether tacitly or in writing, was instantly apparent to both, each moreover being at the moment also conscious of the perception of the other. All evil circumstance fled before that first mutual gaze, a gaze subtilely tender, though to appearance so manifestly frank. Even Barbara forgot that she was on the eve of thirty, possibly, also, that she could live but once.

‘ You look well,’ said Diall.

‘ And you.’ And they both laughed again.

Barbara took the chair pulled out from the table for her, and the other went to the bell-rope.

‘ Tea or coffee ?’

‘ I’ve had my breakfast.’

‘ Somewhere about four o’clock,’ laughed Diall. ‘ Now, decide ;’ for the maid was in the doorway.

‘ Tea, then ;’ and Roger gave the necessary instructions.

He cut her some ham, passed the toast and the cruet across to her, and talked exultantly all the time. What glorious consequences even a downright tragedy might have sometimes !

‘ I want to catch the 10.35 to Millington,

Barbara. You will come? You can spare the day? I see they have got some good pictures on view there. And the man Rowe? He dreams as much as ever. I do believe that nothing but some dire calamity could save him. Something to compel him to an issue. Do you quarrel much?’

‘Theoretically.’

Diall laughed aloud.

‘He couldn’t have got to a better seminary. The man is all theory. Practically an infant. Believes in shepherds and milkmaids.’

Aspirations surged through Roger’s brain as he chattered away here. Heroism was getting extinguished. The old, youthful iniquity was revived, nay redoubled, in him. To *this*, was not his former feeling

but a shallow fancy? Abandon her to theorists ! That clearly was the revocable conclusion.

The time went, neither knew how. Once or twice, when Diall awoke to self-consciousness, it was only to recognise exultantly how trivial, after all, was the malign influence even of an ancestral tragedy upon the actual current of an existing world. He rejoiced that it was so, swore that it should be so, and emphasized the fact immediately by a renewed outburst of boyish abandonment.

Barbara was in correspondent mood. She had not set foot in a railway-train for two years, so that she found something peculiarly invigorating in the mere speed of the unaccustomed movement, apart from the exceptional conditions under which she

was now permitted to enjoy it. It was more than an hour's journey to the great town of Millington, but Barbara wished it had been longer. The compartment was abandoned to them all the way, a fact, no doubt, which did not lessen the sense of satisfaction in the enterprise.

On the spacious platform, amidst the hurrying throng, her heart beat rapidly. Just as Diall had inhaled the calm and fragrant atmosphere of the dozing market-town upon his arrival, so Barbara sniffed eagerly this more pungent medium. Her companion was striding unconcernedly towards the point of egress, when a hand placed quickly upon his arm checked him. He understood the glance, laughed, and turned away to linger by the book-stall. Barbara, too, stood there, and surveyed

the current of life which flowed around her.

‘Come,’ she said at length, moving onwards with a strangely resolute expression upon her features.

‘Oh, you are ready!’ was the jocular response.

Diall knew little of the depth of emotion which Barbara was now sounding. The five years which had elapsed since any real intimacy of communion had had their effect, and for this he made insufficient allowance. That she was receiving an impression of some kind he could not fail to discover, had of course expected as inevitable, and it was on account of this perception that he withheld the communication which was the main object of their meeting. He had no will to check too

soon the obvious flow of her enjoyment,—
any more than of his own.

Into the street they went, and became mere drops in the seething mass of life. Diall wanted to converse ; to watch through every fleeting minute that exhilarating play of features, to hear ceaselessly the magic of that tongue : but Barbara could not talk. They were not mere hurrying men and women that jostled past her in the street, intent upon some mundane triviality more or less ignoble : they were incarnations of a world, pressing eagerly forward on the sacred quest to an ideal goal, indefinite there on the horizon ; as abstract, perhaps, and as far from any known reality as that with which she twitted her confessedly ideal Rowe. Her brown eyes gleamed wide on everything

passing about her, and her spare cheeks were enriched by an unusually beautiful tint. Even a casual observer frequently singled her from the throng, and was lifted from his sordid task by the one unintelligible glance. It would dwell with him till the morrow.

She was not to be confused with the ordinary passengers of the pavement. Diall noted that, and it made his heart beat quicker. Despite the simplicity of her attire, (nearly all of it the product of her own, yes, unwilling needle,) there was nothing insignificant about her. The whole served but to emphasize the individual.

Roger looked at her frequently, and more than once he made the remark,

‘ You are enjoying it, Barbara.’

Her answer was the same each time, as

well as the look which accompanied it.

‘It was good of you to bring me here.’

At length, turning from the busy thoroughfare, they entered a square with an imposing statue of a local magnate in the centre, and a large, new building on the right, with a spacious flight of steps to the entrance.

‘Would you rather not spare the time for this?’ asked Diall.

‘What! All you have come for! Let us proceed. Everything is a delight,—a vast delight to me.’

So they entered the art-gallery together.

The quietude of this sacred building came as a relief to both, but with repose came also to Barbara the consciousness of a racking head-ache. At the top of the stairs she paused a moment to place her

forehead against a smooth stone pillar, but at a movement of her companion, who was just in front, she hastily joined him. Having examined the statuary and substantial relics displayed in the vestibule, they passed in to the central gallery, and, before beginning their inspection here, at Diall's suggestion they sat upon a bench to rest.

Here also Roger felt the utter incongruity of broaching the subject of their own trumpery and sordid family cares. He could still even grant a laugh to them, a hearty laugh, so inconceivably petty did they appear in the face of this.

‘How completely one gets beyond the world in a place like this!’ remarked Barbara then.

‘You feel it? The same thought was

just engaging me. Surely that feeling, if retained but for a single moment, must permanently affect one's attitude towards the baser facts of that world ?'

'It ought to do so,' said Barbara, with less vivacity ; 'but the actual day is mighty powerful.'

'It is,' returned Diall, noting the peculiar smile with which she had spoken.

They soon afterwards rose, and began a systematic survey of the walls. The collection was a miscellaneous one, but entirely of pictures comparatively recent, although all by genuine artists of more or less solid reputation. To Barbara the experience was practically a novel one ; for, although within a year of the thirties, she had scarcely come in contact yet with the civilized world. For all that, she would

have struck nobody as inexperienced, for her imagination had been so active and her reading so diverse that she had acquired a better perception of the current of the world than the majority of its more sophisticated inhabitants. She devoted herself with enthusiasm to the matter in hand, making intelligent suggestions and putting intelligent queries to her companion about every individual picture. Diall soon found, though, that her interest centred in the figure-pieces and not in the landscape. A glimpse of the sea would hold her long; and one study of sky and ocean—merely a wide stretch of grey overclouded sea—she pronounced to be the gem of the collection. Over anything suggestive of sexual love she did not linger; but here, too, Diall acknowledged her brief remarks very

much to the point. Deficient in prudery, perhaps, but every syllable a woman's. If Diall had mistrusted her capacity for general sentiment, a single remark must have put him at his ease. One picture there was Ford Madox Brown's 'The Emigrants.' It had held Barbara long on their first scrutiny, but at the end of all she desired to return to it. They went, and Roger slyly watched her features as she gazed into those of the emigrants.

'The effect of that woman's face is marvellous,' said she, as they turned away. 'She is not crying; but if we were alone I should cry with her.' And Diall was glad of it.

Two hours they spent in this inspiring atmosphere, and then Barbara was compelled to confess herself exhausted. So

they went out, and sought a place for a less ethereal species of refreshment.

The afternoon was again devoted to the spiritual, but in a form less exacting than the inspection of many pictures. They had seen the announcement of an organ recital in the town-hall for three o'clock that day, so thither in due course they repaired. This proved to be the needed sedative to Barbara's overstrained nerves, and they had not sat long in the place before Diall, as much to his satisfaction as amusement, perceived that his companion slept. For upwards of half-an-hour she continued so ; her face bowed slightly forward, but, save to the only one near enough to overhear the gentle regularity of her breathing, with no obvious betrayal of her condition. The audience was small,

and characteristically sparse, and these two sat apart. When at length Barbara raised her head, and glanced aside with a little extra colour, Diall found the occasion irresistible, and he allowed his hand to creep stealthily to hers, and she hers to nestle in it. And the extra colour deepened.

Heroism, then, was admittedly extinct, and ‘youthful iniquity’ more advisedly perpetuated.

Later, they were sitting in opposite corners of a third-class railway-carriage, speeding to an end—at length alone.

‘Does your father still harbour his grudge against me?’ asked Diall, lowering his newspaper.

‘We never refer to it. As you know,

he is not one voluntarily to alter his position, even if convinced of its absurdity.'

'No, I suppose not. But look here, Barbara,'—a desperate effort must be made, for the moments were now strictly limited,—'I want to ask your opinion upon an imaginary problem. If an ancestor some two or three generations back perpetrates a scandalous fraud which escapes detection, what is the position of the respective descendants when it chances to be discovered?'

'Then it is not an imaginary problem,' replied she, looking him fixedly in the face. 'It is for this you have come down here, Roger. Mr. Rowe has put the same question to me. I said to him that anybody of average honesty could scarcely consider it a question.'

‘You did?’

He laughed, and crossed over to sit beside her.

‘What is it about? Some additional desirable possession of ours, I suppose.’

‘It is, dearest. I will tell you.’

He took one of her hands, and told her briefly the facts of the discovery, omitting of course all reference to the element of tragedy which it contained, and making it merely a matter of fraud.

‘That sum of money, then, would have saved old Medlicott, saved not only his possessions, but his life into the bargain,’ commented Barbara, quietly. ‘I consider that his life is on our hands as well as his goods.’

‘So I consider it,’ said Diall. ‘What ought we to do? I can contribute something.’

‘Oh, the horror of it! . . . Vile . . . vile! . . . But I can handle it, Roger.’

‘You, Barbara? But you will let me be with you; you will——’

His caress stung her to anger, instead of soothing her as he intended. Tears hung on her eyelashes as she stared at the window.

‘You,—yes, that’s it! To have destroyed our own lives is not sufficient, we must also destroy yours. Let me go as you have written. It is hateful that you should have ever seen me. What would you have been now but for me? It puts me into a frenzy to think of it. To drain the best years of your life, and to support what? Let us sink to the dregs that we belong to. Roger, I have the right to demand it,’ she continued, turning towards

him and withdrawing the hand that had been captive. 'Your letter was and shall be final. I have accepted it. I am now free to act.'

'But, Barbara, you are not logical,' he replied, calmly. 'How can this new problem lead you to speak so? Does it not strike at the root of me as much as at the root of you? We are both one there in that confounded old swindler. Moral responsibility acknowledges no law of primogeniture. I represent him equally with you. How is it the result of my love for you?'

'In that way, it is not; but I forbid you to make any sacrifices for it.'

'What will you do? May I, as one interested in your welfare, ask that?'

'I shall see Mr. Cox, the solicitor, and,

if necessary, every stick shall be sold.'

Barbara again turned her face to the window and the darkness without, and for a space both were silent.

'Yes, I knew you would do this,' said Diall, at length. 'It is the only course. And after?'

'That we must wait and see.'

'Barbara, we cannot part like this, and I am obliged to return to London this evening. You cannot refuse me the balm of feeling myself with you. That letter is now cancelled. You know with what torment I wrote it. Will not my love be any support to you? Do not let the actual day be too powerful. You know what was your feeling amongst the pictures.'

'But why is the letter cancelled?'

‘Because you have permitted me to render again my devotion. Don’t you hear that outburst of the organ to celebrate it? No mere ugly discovery can cancel that.’

‘But you took an unfair advantage. You ought to have told me this in the train this morning.’

She just raised her eyes to his, and his significant smile disarmed her.

‘That was likely,’ he remarked, drily. ‘Will it be no help to you to know that something lies beyond all this? Future days like this, dear girl, without a parting in the evening? Assure me that it will not, and that letter shall be irrevocably confirmed. If the sordid facts were to mould our life, there would be but a sorry time for some of us. Shall I free you,

Barbara? Rid you of the unprofitable burden?’

There was no audible reply to this, but she permitted her hand to be taken prisoner without resistance, and when Dially turned her face round to him no resentment was depicted there. Upon this he ventured to proceed farther, and in unspoken, though in no uncertain terms, their ten-year-old compact was once more confirmed.

‘Yes, I will write to Rowe to-morrow. I can easily pass it off for a joke. Thank heaven he is there, for it would be intolerable to think of you alone. Write to me of everything, and telegraph for me if you want me.’

‘Have no fear for me. This day of life

that you have given me has imparted strength for anything. It was subtly done,'—with her head leaning against his shoulder, their eyes met in the dim lamp-light.

‘Will you see Cox to-night?’

‘Certainly.’

‘The next stop is Knapstone, Barbara. I don’t seem to have told you half.’

‘No more mysteries, I hope?’

‘Ay, hundreds more, my darling. There, the steam is off! Once, Barbara——’

Diall had only to get his bag from the cloak-room, and take his seat again in the same train. They talked through the window for a minute, clasped hands once more, and Barbara stepped back towards the lamp-post. The last glimpse that Roger had was of the slight figure stand-

ing motionless in the dim light of that quiet platform, and somewhat sadly he carried it away with him in his heart to the roaring world towards which he speeded.

From the station Barbara went to the office of the solicitor, and was closeted there for about half-an-hour. She had a slight previous acquaintance with him, and as he was an old-fashioned, homely old gentleman, she had no difficulty in disclosing the whole of her story to him. He evinced unusual interest in the affairs of his client, and undertook to see what could be done.

‘ But, my dear young lady, if you do as you suggest,—that is, of course, if you can persuade your father to do as you suggest,

—it is far from probable that there will be a penny to spare for debts of a former generation.’

‘I mean the homestead, the land, and everything,’ urged Barbara, in triumph.

‘To be sure, to be sure. I hold the deeds of them for the first mortgagee, and I have notice of at least a second. In these times, I shall be surprised if we get more than the money advanced. In fact, I would rather be the first mortgagee than the second.’

In the course of the conversation, the real condition of her father’s affairs was made manifest to the poor girl’s unbusiness-like intelligence, and her heart sank at the revelation. Her courage had built so largely upon the prospect of the repayment of that considerable sum of money to

the Medlicotts, and thus altering the whole aspect of life to them who had been so cruelly wronged. Never a doubt of it had occurred to her. If she could not do that, what indeed was the future before her? The lawyer saw the pain he was inflicting, and out of sheer commiseration modified his statements.

‘Of course, my suppositions are only general. I may be mistaken. We will hope for the best. I had better come and see your father quietly at Murcott. Not to-morrow; but say the next day, in the afternoon; that do?’

Barbara assented, and went her way.

She had driven half the journey homewards, through the frosty starlight, before she had recovered from this new and unexpected blow. Even then it was by no

conscious effort of her own that she revived. Of a sudden, as though by lightning flash, the spirit of the morning returned to her, and she beheld herself from that outer standpoint. This led her into wider and far sunnier fields.

Yes, that day, she felt, had done much for her. Whatever her previous attitude, and however unemotional her temperament, she now gladly confessed to unexpected strength from that pressure of a human lover. He ministered to something definite within her, if, perhaps, those animated streets ministered to more. His presence sustained her, inspirited her, renewed hope in her.

In the review of that day she grew calm.

CHAPTER II.

AT BAY.

THE Pool Farm lay silent and obscure beneath the stars when Barbara reached it. She scanned more critically than was her wont the outline of the roof and chimneys, and of the tall pine-tree at the west end by the ricks, which rose in silhouette against the sky, and was conscious of an unfamiliar thrill of emotion at the sight which so frequently before had only irked her. A feeling of self-reproach emphasized the perception, for, now that the

prospect of separation returned to her, the old place inevitably assumed in her mind a sentient personality, and she regretted the ungenerous thoughts with which she had for so long regarded it. Confronting once more the task which she had undertaken, and perhaps anxious to prolong the few moments of reflective calm that yet remained, Barbara drew rein at the gateway and indulged for a space her pensive mood.

Rebellious as she had ever been, anxious for almost any means of deliverance from the hated seclusion of these crumbling, ivied walls, now that the prospect of separation loomed actual before her she was to find that the faculty of veneration, which she had so long deemed almost an unknown quantity within her, was not ex-

tinged. Associations were awakened, and began to weave their subtle threads about her heart; some rising clear from the golden haze of her own imaginative childhood, some no doubt from the mere vague and impersonal impressions bequeathed as idiosyncrasies by her ancestors. Many times, at moments of extremest irritation, had she passionately repudiated the parentage of this wrinkled home; flung off its embraces with an unfilial scorn; joyously acknowledged herself a cuckoo in the nest of the stranger; but this maturer contemplation in the darkness gave some hint of the old foster-parent being yet able to count her revenges.

As Barbara paused here, musing on these altered feelings, an unexpected sound aroused her. The men must have gone

long since home, for she calculated that it was after seven; and visitors were rare now. But the gate banged, and that was her father's voice,—this time in unmistakable anger. The listener's heart throbbed. Had anyone forestalled her? She could see two figures in the darkness; obviously in altercation. Nay, more, there was a scuffling, if not an actual struggle. Had Mr. Rowe——? Barbara almost leaped from her seat, and ran forward in their direction.

‘Serve me with a writ, damn ’ee!’ she heard in the well-known accents of indignation as she drew near. ‘You be the first as have ever ventur’d to do it, look ’ee, and you shall serve ne’er another. Ult bring a writ to the Pool Farm? ’St-hire?’

‘What are you doing, father?’ cried Barbara, still some paces off.

‘Help!’ shrieked an unknown voice.
‘He’s going to murder me.’

‘Murder ’ee! Ay, that I will,’ was Bezaleel’s answer, as he shook the individual that was in his grasp; ‘that I will, if six feet o’ muck and water can do for ’ee. ’Tull be over nat’ral to ’ee, I doubt, but we’ll do our best. There, and be damned to ’ee and your writ, both!’

As Barbara clutched the arm of her father, there was a heavy plunge into the pool, and both of them were covered with the splash of the dirty water. Not they only, for at the same moment Rowe had come up hastily beside them. He turned instantly to the obscure figure in the pond, in obedience to Barbara’s directions, and

was relieved to see it already scrambling vigorously to the margin. He knew that at this part the water was not more than a foot or two deep, but the capabilities of the mud had been uncertain. Now that the man was finally in safety, Rowe felt unable to resist the humour of the situation, and he laughed audibly. This exasperated the victim, and he poured forth a volley of threats, of the most dire vehemence and import. Execution satisfactorily accomplished, Barbara had been able to overcome her father, and, whilst Rowe was receiving the confidences of the lawyer's clerk, she was listening to the dregs of the old man's frenzy as she accompanied him to the house.

‘A writ to a Winnett, look ’ee!’ cried the wrathful one. ‘What next shall us

have to look for, I ask? They never lost a penny by me, yet, did 'em, ne'er a one; they've only to give me time. Time be the item. What be there to sell in December, tell me? Let 'em give me time and——'

Such were the notes upon which Bezaleel rang his irate changes, to the whole series of which his daughter listened in absolute silence. The moment for disclosing her own proposals had clearly not yet come.

Rowe was, in the meantime, accompanying the drenched and much-besoiled writ-server to a neighbouring cottage, where he might take steps to ease himself of some at least of the most unpleasant consequences of his disaster.

The effect of the incident upon him was by no means exhausted by such untoward

results as were immediately obvious. The circumstances of his having been there at all to incur them were peculiar, for the mere service of the writ had occupied a very insignificant place in his estimate of the expedition. Being a clerk in the office of the lawyer conducting the particular business to which it related, he had, for quite private reasons, obtained by special request the privilege of executing this mission to Murcott. The young man was enamoured of a cottage girl in this village, and sniffing the opportunity of a visit to his beloved, with special provision of expenses, he had volunteered for the duty which promised them. Thus it was that he had chosen this particular hour for his journey, and the particular garments in which Winnett had seen him to be arrayed. Being a man

of conscience, he had naturally preferred duty to pleasure, and had done no more than apprise the blushing maiden of the ecstasy attending his immediate return from the Pool Farm. But the maiden awaited him in vain. It was only as a result of later anxious inquiry that at length she found him in old Yoxall's cottage, wrapped in a blanket, with a heavy eye upon a pair of steaming trousers before him. Not pausing for an explanation she fled, and the lovers were not to meet again that night.

Harbouring all this in his heart, it was scarcely surprising that Rowe found the man unappeasable. The utmost rigour of the law he would have, and no offer of fine gold should restrain him.

‘It will not end here,’ commented Rowe, in his talk with Barbara later.

‘It will not,’ said she, but did not explain herself.

In the course of the following day, a couple of policemen arrived at Murcott. Whether daylight had helped to clear Bezaleel’s reason, or whether it was a mere concession to superior forces, I will not decide; but the fact was obvious to Rowe, who stood by, that the old farmer received his summons without an objection. His lip quivered as he took the paper and cast his eye down it. Muttering was audible—‘unlawfully assault and beat,’—‘then and there in the due execution,’—‘made and provided.’

‘All right, Master Winnett?’ said one of the peace-officers, jocularly.

‘I judges it be . . . you’ll have a drop of cider.’

The constables went to the house, and were hospitably entertained.

The magistrates met the next day at Knapstone, and after an expression of opinion from the chairman as to the enormity of the offence, especially when considered in relation to the position of the accused, Winnett, in his absence, was fined five pounds, and the cost of a new outfit to the victim of his violence. The money was immediately paid by Mr. Cox, who had attended the court on Bezaleel's behalf.

Some openly questioned where the money came from, but nobody knew. Winnett himself made no inquiry upon that or any other point arising out of the adventure. Everything was managed by his daughter.

After the constables had left the Pool Farm, Rowe had engaged Barbara in conversation.

‘It will be a heavy fine, Miss Winnett. Better engage a solicitor to appear. Your father won’t go, I expect.’

‘Is he not bound to go?’ asked she, in surprise.

‘Oh, no. You drive over and see a lawyer this afternoon : you know one?’

‘Ye-es,’—Barbara raised a finger to her lips and creased her forehead. Rowe had watched her closely since the previous evening, and noticed the changed expression on her features.

‘You are above conventional reticence,’ he burst out. ‘It is not convenient for you to pay now? Is that it?’ he added, lightly, looking into her face. ‘Let me.’

‘Not a farthing, Mr. Rowe,’ she exclaimed, emphatically. ‘Our behaviour to you already has been intolerable. You must leave us, and the twenty pounds shall be repaid to you.’ She knew nothing of the subsequent thirty.

Rowe looked astonishment.

‘We are going to sell this place,’ added Barbara. You know why,’—and she withheld not her eyes from him. ‘Mr. Diall has been playing a joke upon you. He is my cousin, and from him I have heard of the debt to the Medlicotts.’

‘Roger Diall your cousin! Is it possible?’ was all he could utter.

Barbara did not repress the smile which the expression of his face aroused in her.

‘Your cousin! You knew my friendship with him? Oh, it is too bad!’

‘He says that he is about to write to you.’

Rowe turned away to the window to overcome the first effect of his amazement. From where she stood, Barbara continued her confession. Everything was to be sold ; every article in the establishment ; and multifarious debts paid. That accomplished and the result known, she should the better be able to consider in what direction her duty to the Medlicotts lay.

‘Does Diall agree with you in this?’ asked Rowe, without turning.

‘Unreservedly.’ Then followed a short silence.

‘But you will not have time to communicate with Diall. I insist upon paying this fine as a friend of his. You may call

it what you like; but unless you can solemnly assure me that it is wholly unnecessary—'

He took two notes from a pocket-book, and laid them on the table. In doing so their eyes met.

'I will accept them as a loan, Mr. Rowe. Thank you.'

Barbara drove to Knapstone soon thereafter, and saw her solicitor.

Rowe wandered about the frosty fields all that afternoon, stopping occasionally in some hedge-bottom to draw figures in a patch of snow. This last discovery, in vital interest, of course far surpassed the one he had made at the withy, for it transformed all that at once into a more or less personal matter. No longer was it a subject for mere abstract speculation, but one

affecting the life-history of his sole intimate, Roger Diall. How those vague impressions were now explained ! He had so often felt the peculiar spirit of Diall about the place ; as it now appeared not without reason. And she ! The cause of his silence ? Impossible. For what earthly reason ? No, they were cousins. It was in no respect likely. She said that he had not been here for five years ; a fact surely conclusive. With all her peculiarities, she was of an admirable spirit. A woman to be respected, and, if only for friend Diall's sake, stood by in approaching disasters. Stand by her he would, and see the end. Contribute to that end ? Why not ? he asked himself. Had a more worthy opportunity been ever afforded him ? He was assured not.—So in disjointed mus-

ings he rambled on through meadow and orchard, until the short afternoon showed signs of closing. A ruddy streak appeared amidst the clouds in the south-west, and he turned towards the house.

In the home orchard he encountered Miriam, gathering some clothes from a line, clothes which under the pretence of drying had got frozen into buckram. He smote some of them with his stick as he stood beside her.

‘Would you like a farm-house again, Miriam, as your grandfather used to have?’

The girl looked into his face, as she always did when he addressed her.

‘There’s no man of us, sir,’ was her reply.
‘We couldn’t look after it.’

‘No, but it might not be impossible for you to get one, I think.’

She did not understand his facetiousness, and he did not enforce it.

‘Supposing it was possible in some manner to look after it, would you like to have your homestead back?’

‘Oh, yes, sir! For we should have a pony, shouldn’t we? And Lalie could drive about where she liked.’

Rowe looked at her with speculative interest in the gathering twilight. It was a soft, characterless face, in purity of complexion almost equalling her sister’s, but in mould not so regular and attractive. There was something of heaviness about the eyes, too, suggesting an excess of good-nature at the expense of the more intellectual and independent qualities.

‘That would be what you’d like it most for, then?’

‘And other things. Mother wouldn’t have to go out to work, as her rheumatism be getting so bad. I’ve heard her say that she would like to have had a farm-house to look after.’

‘H’m. Has Miss Barbara come back?’

‘No, sir. Will they send master to son, sir?’

The question was put with such impulsive earnestness, and in such an impressive undertone, that Rowe laughed as he gave her the negative assurance. He strolled forward to the house, and Miriam peeped over her shoulder at him as he went.

After the case was settled by the magistrate, Barbara’s solicitor drove over to Murcott, and attended at the Pool Farm. Rowe chanced to be about the place when

he arrived, by design, probably, for he exchanged some words with the gentleman on the way to the house.

‘You’ll see me again before you go?’ said Rowe at the door.

The lawyer looked at him and nodded.

Barbara ushered the visitor into the parlour in a state of suppressed agitation. For a few moments her tongue refused to permit her even monosyllables in response to the gentleman’s civil inquiries, but ultimately she commanded herself more completely. Old Winnett, who was sitting in the arm-chair, looked up in astonishment at the stranger’s entrance.

‘I asked Mr. Cox to call here, father.’

The farmer’s eyes shot at his daughter angry inquiry, for some seconds before the words were uttered.

‘And what for, pray, Barbara?’

‘To talk over our affairs. Things cannot go on as they have been doing lately,’ said the girl, firmly.

‘What! Have you turned against me an’ all, maid?’ said the old man, in an altered tone, which sounded to Barbara pathetic by contrast to the reckless anger which she had been prepared for.

‘No, no, Master Winnett. Is it likely?’ interposed the lawyer, who was not above a tinge of the vernacular when the occasion was fitting. ‘Don’t her bread lie in the same oven with yours? Be reasonable, man, and let’s make the best of a bad job.’

This tone of authority was exactly what Bezaleel needed, and the effect of it was immediately apparent.

‘Give me time. Let ’em give me time,

and we'll be straight in a year or two.'

'But that's what they won't do,' returned the other, forcibly. 'If we don't take things into our own hands, next week they'll be in somebody else's. You've raised a hornet's nest about you, and they won't rest until you've felt 'em.'

Winnett sat back in his upright old oak chair; and stared mutely at his antagonists. One hand lay on the scroll of the chair's arm, and the other was thrusting back the mass of grey dishevelled hair from the forehead, showing distinctly the white skin which the hat had habitually screened from the influence of the weather. All the rest of the face was tanned by nearly three quarters of a century's exposure to the varied elements.

'Have I lived to be made a bankrupt,

then, at last?' said the old man, as though scarce comprehending the import of his own question.

'That's just what we want to prevent.'

The lawyer then entered into a lucid exposition of the case, tearing away ruthlessly the flimsy veils which his knowledge and experience enabled him to know would be the refuge of this hardened old eluder. Mercy, he well knew, would be mischievous here, so he gave none. Everything was painted in the most lurid light. It was only a movement of Barbara's which checked him. She had been standing by the table with her eyes downward,—raised occasionally to glance at her father. At length she moved away to the window, and the lawyer saw that her hand passed quickly before her face.

‘That’s the diagnosis, then,’ he said, less earnestly, ‘and some of the normal consequences of the position. When the game is once proved to be lost, it is nothing short of lunacy to protract it. If checked at the present moment, many of these consequences may, I believe, be avoided. But, Winnett, you must sell everything.’

‘And go to the workhouse?’

‘No, I don’t think that will be immediately necessary. Under certain conditions, I believe I can ensure you a residence here; under certain conditions, I say. Yes, under this roof, I mean. I have got an offer for the place just as it stands, exactly as you hold it.’

At that moment Barbara saw Rowe getting over the fence into the orchard

opposite, and she knew the source of the offer.

‘This gentleman you have living with you has made the offer.’

‘What, Mr. Rowe!’ cried Bezaleel, starting from his chair. ‘Fetch him in, Barbara. That man be a gentleman if the world have one, none of your damned mistrusting villians, ur beunt. He shall have the place.’

The instantaneous change in the old man was remarkable. He agreed to every proposition; showed the utmost eagerness to dispose of his birthright and ‘all the damned tack, appurtenant to it for any or no consideration.’

When Rowe entered, Bezaleel darted forward and grasped his hand. The revulsion of feeling in the farmer had every

appearance of alcoholic intoxication. He swore a life-long allegiance to the new proprietor in incoherent utterances; foresaw for him a long line of descendants and successors equal in honour to his illustrious self; and finally dispatched Barbara for a quart or two of cider (that being the strongest stimulant that the establishment just then afforded) to substantiate his pledges, and serve as the indispensable seal to the prospective bargain.

In the face of this, it was some few minutes before the sober conversation could be renewed, and when this was effected it was of a very different nature from that which had preceded. Winnett had outbursts of positive hilarity from time to time, and was utterly reckless in the matter of instructions to the lawyer.

He knew Mr. Cox for a tidy man, he said, —which, of course, could not be said for many others in his trade,—and he put himself entirely in his hands. Do what he liked. He'd sign anything they wanted. But let any other varmint come to serve a writ on him, in his Sunday best, and he should not forget the name of the farm at Murcott.

Mr. Cox stayed to dinner, and the meal passed in extremest joviality.

CHAPTER III.

PEACE AND GOOD-WILL.

By Christmas Eve Rowe found himself a landed proprietor, to the extent, at least, of a dilapidated homestead with out-buildings appurtenant, and two hundred and sixty acres of mixed land. The acquisition had been the result of a somewhat indefinite impulse, promptly acted upon according to his wont ; but, seeing now that it represented the bulk of the capital from which his available income had hitherto sprung, it behoved him to consider, with some eye

to the practical, the significance of the situation. Of this he was aware, and he considered it accordingly. He was resolved, at any rate, that the farm should in the first place be made a sure means of livelihood to such as were connected with it, and what theoretic residue there was in contemplation should be engrafted upon that, not substituted for it. In compassing this end he was assured, by the opinion of experts, that there ought to be no measure of difficulty; but, it was suggested, Bezaleel Winnett need not be his manager.

Roger Diall had been disquieted by the proposition, and had done his utmost to dissuade his friend from carrying out what he called ‘such a fanatical enterprise.’ By a threat of himself coming

post to Murcott to interpose, he had even inveigled Rowe into a journey to town, and the two had discussed the matter throughout a whole night in the flat in Chelsea. Rowe, however, was not to be turned from his purpose. The review of it, indeed, amidst the activity of the London streets served only to redouble the strength of its hold upon him. However it appeared to him in the frosted fields at Murcott, here it shone out unmistakably as a golden opportunity, especially reserved for him by a benign fate.

‘But do you mean yourself to become a farmer?’ demanded Diall, loudly, and perhaps derisively.

‘For the present I do. You have often urged me to honest labour, and I believe you have reason in it.’

‘Yes, but I suspect you in this matter. It is some theoretic delusion impelling you. I am convinced of it, Ned. Grain and bullocks are not your foremost consideration. Confess it!’

‘They are not my only consideration, but certainly, for the present, they are the foremost. I mean to make the place a sound financial investment.’

‘But what in heaven’s name do you know of farming?’

‘Your uncle, at any rate, knows something about it, and his knowledge I can put to account without allowing him the manipulation of the funds. Moreover, a man of reasonable intelligence has an advantage in that calling as in others. I have perceived this much in the few weeks that I have been down there. I already

feel quite competent to revise his methods.'

'Well, now for the ideal aspects?'

'They are not determinate enough to talk about. You know my general views. I am not meditating any very elaborate experiment. No Brook Farm business. If I do anything, it will be merely upon the average material that exists there. Perhaps some of my views have become modified. I see that somewhat fallacious estimates of rural existence are current, but the main hold of my theory remains unassailable.'

One practical service which Diall was able to render his friend took the form of a letter of introduction to a prosperous farmer who resided a few miles distant from the village of Murcott. This, Rowe was unfeignedly glad of.

‘He is a homespun man, as we say in Cotswold,’ Diall remarked about his bucolic acquaintance; ‘but absolutely solid. A genial man, and any opinion he feels disposed to offer you will be of value—of that you may be assured.’

Beyond this there was but little result from the meeting of the two men. If there was any shade of mutual suspicion in another direction, both were careful to conceal it. Barbara was spoken of quite frankly, to the extent of a warm, if but friendly, appreciation on the part of Rowe.

‘I rely greatly upon her for the success of my undertaking,’ Rowe had remarked at one point.

‘What she can do, she will,’ was the confident reply. ‘She has spoken in no indefinite terms of your conduct.’

Rowe was conscious of a greater degree of pleasure in this remark than he would have thought probable.

‘She is painfully actual, if I may use the phrase,’ was his comment; ‘but I suppose it is useless to expect anybody to perceive the ideal in their every-day surroundings.’

‘They have to see it in something they know nothing about, eh, Ned?’

But the idealist held his peace.

It was on Rowe’s return from this visit to Chelsea that he was informed of the result of the solicitor’s negotiations in old Winnett’s affairs. To the astonishment of everybody, the available assets had proved adequate to a first and final dividend of twelve shillings in the pound to all creditors. It was with alacrity accepted, and

in due course Bezaleel found himself a free, if penniless, man. Seeing the exceptionally mitigated effect of that grim inevitable which had at length confronted him, it was with reason that the old man found cause for congratulation in the issue. Now that he was at liberty to consider things more abstractly, in his dim way he perceived that that protracted game of blind-man's-buff round about his homestead had inspired him with a sense of weary aversion for the old place,—an aversion possibly equalling in intensity that which, upon far different grounds, had for so long harassed his daughter. It was clear to Bezaleel that fate had cast an eye upon his family,—a perception of long standing which had, no doubt, played an important part in the simplification of this

final issue. He was the last of his clan, (no Winnett took account of women,) and himself fast approaching the extremity of his tether. He was little of a hero, therefore knew not the impulse which urges to death upon the field. It seemed far more satisfactory to accept that by-way of escape, and reserve a day for making terms with the enemy. Was it not indeed like the final triumph of his passion for elusion? To a few it is permitted so. He could now enter upon an age of retirement, —secure in the indispensable intercourse with his patrimony, rid of the baneful attributes which had poisoned such intercourse. Moreover, he could regard, with rather more than complacency, the ultimate succession; for he regarded Rowe as a

discovery of his own, and began to feel for him paternally.

Christmas Eve, then, found a degree of seasonable good-humour about the Pool Farm, such as had not illumined it for many a year past. Rowe had endeavoured to bring his friend Diall within reach of its influence, but the project was abandoned. Both Roger and Barbara decided that it was not a favourable moment for commencing reconciliations of that kind, and to such expression of opinion Rowe immediately deferred. Old Winnett was as yet wholly ignorant of the connection between his obliterated nephew and this new favourite, whom as a logical result of that askance view at the adverse inevit-

able, he was already beginning to consider his own direct heir ; so to him the suggestion had not been submitted.

Ostensibly, at least, Barbara contributed her share to the good-humour. It had been Rowe's suggestion that the family at the Downs should benefit by the altered aspect of affairs, and mild festivities had accordingly been arranged for. The preparations presented Rowe in a new light, somewhat to the astonishment of the observant Barbara. He betrayed an unsuspected aptitude for careless jocularity, to which it seemed that even himself had been habitually a stranger. He was solicitous for a scrupulous conformity to local usages ; was himself foremost in bringing in armfuls of holly, yew, ivy, and other evergreens, and

showed a childish merriment in cutting the tufts of mistletoe from the orchard. In this latter pursuit he got Barbara to accompany him, and she openly commented on the condition of his spirits.

‘Yes, I feel boisterous,’ he replied to her, from the bough of an apple-tree. ‘I have never felt the enjoyment of living before. This half-savage freedom is more to me than all the allurements of civilization. Don’t you feel the charm of it—now?’

Barbara shrugged her shoulders, but gave an uncompromising answer.

‘You are incorrigible!’ he cried. ‘Why, look, there goes Miriam; singing, of course. What else should she do?’

‘What else, indeed!’ added Barbara, with a smile.

‘Oh, you are so like your cousin Diall. That was his reply exactly. Your philosophy is most unphilosophic.’

‘I am blameless of philosophy, as I have said before. I do not aspire to organize the world.’

There was an unusual mildness in Barbara’s retort, nevertheless her companion suspected her of sarcasm. He descended the ladder, and they walked on towards the house.

Some time later, Rowe was hanging his spoil in various parts of the large hall, and Miriam passed through. The man was standing on a chair, and he called out to the girl,

‘Give me that bunch on the table, Miriam, will you?’

She went to hand it up to him, and,

when her arm was raised, he pushed her wrist back until it was directly over her head, and then he quickly stooped and kissed her.

‘Thank you,’ he said, calmly taking the mistletoe from her fingers.

‘Oh, sir!’ But Miriam’s errand to the hall was accomplished, so she ran off.

A few minutes later, not knowing that he was there, Barbara came in, singing softly her favourite dirge, ‘Fear no more the heat o’ the sun.’

Rowe, who was in a dusky corner, announced his presence by chanting, to no tune in particular, an opposition ditty.

‘Heigh-ho! Sing heigh-ho! Unto the green holly :
Most friendship is feigning, most loving mere folly :
Then heigh-ho, the holly !
This life is most jolly.’

‘ You had the wrong page, Miss Winnett,’ he said, coming forward with a twig of mistletoe in his hand.

‘ I suppose I had,’ she said.

Rowe’s resolution failed him in her presence, so he turned and said,

‘ Will this do ?’ And they talked for a few minutes.

To spend Christmas Eve at the Pool Farm was an event of no little moment to Mrs. Medlicott and her daughter Eulalie. Barbara fetched them in the pony-trap before dusk, and noticed with some interest the different effect of excitement upon mother and daughter. The former kept up a continuous flow of words from the moment of leaving her own door until she reached her destination ; the latter

could scarcely be prevailed upon to mutter a monosyllable all the way.

‘I’m sure it be uncommon kind of the gentleman,’ the elder would say. ‘I never expected no such thing. How should I, my dear, for he be an entire stranger to I? It be a merciful providence as ’ave sent ’un to ’ee, Miss Barbara, I’m sure. What it med have been with you, an’ all, for the master be ageing fast! Poor man, well ’ur may. Well, Lalie, and here be the snow a-coming after all. You said as it would. You be as good as a weather-glass any day,—better, however, than the one as we have, for it have never moved since your father died, and it can’t a’ ought to have been at fair all that time, for us have had storm and tempest and all manner since that day. It have fallen down

a time or two, 'tis true, and that mebbe have deranged the sperrit of it. We med as well ha' let Master Jephcott have it, Lalie, for it beunt of no use to we; but, Miss Barbara, I can't abide to part with them old ancient things, can you? In a manner they do seem a piece of yourselves, I always think. You'll have kep' your furniture and that, o' course. It do seem hard on you, but this gentleman be——'

Despite Rowe's abandonment to the primitive pleasures of his novel situation, he could not but occasionally regard the company of the evening with some degree of conscious curiosity. He would find himself gazing too fixedly at this one or that, in a speculative spirit, and would have to turn it off by some forced sample of his amateur jocularly. About Barbara

and the bashful Eulalie, and the contrasted phases which their respective individualities suggested, his central interest lay. The calm dignity of intellect in the one, apparent—to him—in every word and movement, though at no time obtruded to the point of actual incongruity, could, he admitted, influence him strongly; the ingenuous delicacy of merely a refined natural sensibility in the other could at another moment affect him no less.

‘All this seems painfully childish to you?’ he remarked to Barbara, when the exigencies of some country game (promoted positively by Bezaleel himself) brought them together in privacy.

‘Painfully? Oh, dear no! Do I seem so completely out of place?’

‘Not at all; but you have the power of

commanding yourself. You can do anything gracefully, of course, however deficient you may be feeling in real spontaneity. You do it merely as a pleasant duty, just as you would entertain a group of children if necessary. It affords no entertainment to yourself; isn't it so ?

‘Possibly.’

‘Shall I tell you the most conclusive proof I have of this ?’

Barbara looked at him as she requested a disclosure.

‘I can't give you a kiss in jest, like I could to the others.’

‘That simply means that you also are not self-forgetful in your merriment. It proves little in me.’

‘Do you think so ? Well, of course, I can't pretend to absolute unconsciousness

as yet, but I do better than I should have thought possible some months ago. Clearly I am on the right track.'

'You aim too high, I fear.'

'How do you know what my aims are?' he replied, with a quick glance.

'You have not hidden them. You are endeavouring to adjust yourself to an imaginary world.'

'You are really too bad. Imaginary! What is imaginary?'

'Idyllic life in a farm-house, and——'

'But are we not this very moment actually experiencing it?'

'A pleasant life,—yes, very; but you demand too much from it. Even a golden goblet cannot hold more than its actual measure. Pour too much in, and you waste your wine.'

At that moment the stentorian voice of Bezaleel called them in, and there was an end to their discussion.

Some time later, Rowe found himself alone with a very different companion. To Eulalie, the whole evening had been one of pure enchantment; such an experience as, but a month or two ago, had appeared as likely to befall her as—the acquisition of a husband. A great light had shone suddenly across her path, and she was dazzled by its brilliance. It seemed ridiculous to believe in such a light, but the evidence of her senses was against her. Disbelief became impossible. Rowe's chivalrous attention to the fair cripple was to-night as pronounced as heretofore, and it lost nothing in its influence. The one or two sportive kisses

that he had given her, in the face of the company, had taken permanent hold of her features, and made all effort at calmness finally impossible. With what feelings then did she now leave the room alone with him?

The man's pleasant abandonment could be relieved of all measure of restraint in intercourse with Eulalie, for was it not so perfectly obvious to him that misconception was impossible? Moreover, was not a sublimated adjustment of the sexes the very keynote of the pastoral ideal? Rowe, at any rate, had from the outset in all sincerity perceived this, and it is probable that the perception had urged him upon principle to a fuller display of freedom in these matters than his town-bred sophistication would have prompted.

‘Mr. Rowe ’ave more mettle than I’d ever thought of, Polly,’ roared old Winnett to Mrs. Medlicott, as he heard something from beyond the door. ‘Dash me, I like un the better for it.’

‘I’ll have one directly, Eulalie,’ Rowe had called out, just before his face reappeared in the doorway.

‘One what?’ shouted the farmer, exuberantly. ‘What be you at, ye raskill? But here’s good health to ’ee. You be the best lad I’ve seen for many a day.’

Rowe got from Barbara a needle and thread that he had returned for, and withdrew. Eulalie had escaped to the little room where they waited; but when Rowe entered it he could not see her. Opening the door of a store-closet in one corner, he discerned a pair of glistening eyes just

caught by the lamplight, and he went to draw her out.

‘Not here, sir; it’s not fair,’ cried the girl, as he held her in his arms in the doorway.

‘Not? Look there!’

He pointed to the greenery thrust above a picture-frame on the wall above them, and she gave in. He looked into her face for a second as he lowered his own towards it, and then pressed his lips firmly against Eulalie’s. He had only kissed her cheek before.

‘You roguish little girl!’ he cried, as, laughing, he had pulled her to the chair.

Eulalie had turned pale, and all her frame trembled; but Rowe was too busy to notice any change in her. He had

fetched in a bough of laurel, and was now stripping the leaves from it.

‘Take the needle: I want you to sew these together into a chaplet,—a crown, you know. Like that, look, two and two. Be quick.’

In a minute or two the circle of laurel-leaves was made, and Rowe took it from her.

‘What’s it for, sir?’ she asked, but her heart was beating violently.

The other laughed.

‘Now sit still, Eulalie.’

‘No, no, sir; not for me.’

There was a strange vehemence in her utterance, which even Rowe could not fail to notice.

‘Why not?’ he asked, staring into her flushed face. ‘You are the greatest philo-

sopher I have ever met, and I want to crown you.'

'No, it cannot be for me,' she repeated, and stretched out her white hand to prevent his putting it on her head.

He simply took her by the wrist, and held her arm down whilst he placed the wreath over her golden hair. She allowed it to remain there, and he regarded her from a few feet away. Not a muscle of her face moved as he examined it, but in a few seconds he saw a tear fall from each pair of eyelashes.

'Why, what is it, Eulalie?' he asked, surprised, going to snatch the thing away; but she held it. 'Have I hurt you? You know my fun by now.'

'No, no, sir. It is because I am so glad,' she replied, brushing her eyes quickly.

‘You sensitive child ;’ and he wondered what could be the meaning of it.

The evening was more than indefinitely irksome to Barbara, as Rowe at length could not fail to perceive ; but he could find no further opportunity of rallying her upon her humour until all had withdrawn, and she too was on the point of following. It had been arranged beforehand that the visitors from the Downs should stay at the house all night, a course which without this would have been inevitable, as by midnight the snow lay deep upon the ground, and was still descending in determined silence. It was the first storm of the season, and seemed to offer peculiar attractions to Rowe’s fancy. When he had opened the door, and seen the driven bank

which stood a sheer cliff about two feet deep on the threshold, and the whirling flakes which surrounded him in the lamp-light, he turned to Barbara gleefully, and said,

‘You will stay until I come in, Miss Winnett?’

She assented; he got the lantern, and went out.

After prowling around the homestead and buildings, he returned, radiant, enveloped in snow. He shook himself in the kitchen, removed boots and leggings, and came in to Barbara.

‘Glorious, glorious!’ he cried, flinging himself into a chair. ‘If I could only make you feel it!’

‘I don’t think the effect of such a scene is wholly lost on me.’

‘Oh, but it is; take my word for it. All the night you have been supremely wretched. You cannot dissemble.’

‘As you will,’ said Barbara.

‘I hoped that now it might have been otherwise,’ Rowe continued, looking into the fire. ‘Diall half assured me that it would. The incongruity! I am determined that within a small radius this dejection shall not exist.’

Rowe himself was at this moment inordinately exhilarated; partly the result of an exceptional freedom in the use of stimulants.

‘It is a very kindly intention. From what blissful centre do you draw your radius?’ said Barbara, yawning.

‘From the Pool Farm, Murcott. That was my—one of my—yes, my main object

in obtaining it. Since coming here, I have got a suspicion that country people are not sufficiently aware of their idyllic situation,'—Barbara smiled and aroused herself,—‘and to a few at least I mean to impart light upon the subject.’

‘Certainly.’ Barbara was now far enough away from sleep.

‘It is ridiculous that the health and honourable simplicity of a rural population should be in danger of running to seed, for want of a little judicious hoeing, say,—a little necessary checking of the rank undergrowth. Don’t you think so?’

Rowe was so gratified by his companion’s apparent and unexpected sobriety that he was anxious to keep her with him step by step.

‘By all means ; but why do you make

no reference to their notorious scholarship?’

‘How do you mean?’ said Rowe, sharply, again suspecting her.

‘You referred to health, honourable simplicity,—why miss academical distinction?’

‘What academical distinction? Are you facetious?’ he said, examining her abnormally placid features with anxiety.

‘You are so infallibly informed upon the points you have referred to, that I should not have thought you likely to overlook this one. They all go together.’

‘What on earth can I make of you? Do you mean that they are all equally non-existent?’

‘Something of that kind. It seems to me that you may as justly include scholarship in your ploughman, your carter, or

your favourite (and peculiarly mythical) shepherd as the qualities you mentioned. Let me tell you, for it may save you from disappointment, that our rural population is no more simple, no more healthy, and no more free from care than it is learned.'

Rowe showered out a volley of laughter.

'That is surely enough to condemn yourself,' he cried, jubilantly. 'I paid some heed to you before, despite your extravagant prejudices ; but after that, Miss Winnett ! Ha ! ha !'

Barbara joined in the laugh, and bade him go forward.

'Even if the obvious and rudimentary qualities which I have claimed for the country were non-existent as—ha ! ha ! ha !—you suggest, it would not affect my plans ; for you will admit that they *ought*

to exist. Let us suppose that, in some measure, they do, then I assert that there has been no general effort to engraft anything further upon them.'

'But I should have thought that their mere existence would have been enough to institute the idyllic era, without any further engrafting. Health and honourable simplicity are in themselves a respectable foundation,—whence the necessity even for hoeing?'

'That's just it,' cried the enthusiast. 'You know that the one fly in the apothecary's ointment—— If we had not human nature to contend with, much would be simplified. It is the taint of civilization that affects us.'

'I see,' Barbara remarked. 'So you want to civilize us a little more.'

‘I have reflected on this matter,’ said the other, disregarding her perverse interruption, ‘and it seems to me that no effort has ever been made to weld the village population into such harmonious community as is consistent with the genius of its condition. Hence it is,’ he proceeded, excitedly, ‘hence the predicament, which you are trying to raise into a pre-ordained and inevitable consequence,—that the village life as a community, or in any sense an existing positive quantity, is now utterly and hopelessly defunct; lapsed into a mere confused mass of indifferent, if not bitterly antagonistic units, wholly without any worthy central sympathies,—nay, wholly without any merely common interests in anything except the basest of trivialities or the most sordid of material

anxieties. Can there possibly be a stronger foothold for you cynics than upon this apparent failure of the moralists to influence to any extent such an unsophisticated handful as a parish population ?’

Barbara instantly respected the obvious earnestness of his attitude, and felt an inclination to cavil no longer.

‘ I am glad that you have perceived so much,’ she observed, as he seemed waiting for some remark from her.

Then followed a short silence.

‘ I am intent upon seeing what I can do. To begin with, I want Mrs. Medlicott and Eulalie to come and live down here.’ His companion looked up in surprise. ‘ You told me,’ he added, with a smile, ‘ that you considered this farm as their property, so you will make no objection ?’

Barbara's expression altered.

‘Mr. Rowe, how can it concern me?’ she said, in response to his continued gaze.

‘Don’t say that, please. I hope you know that I am more than unwilling to do anything distasteful to you and your father. I am going to extend our dairy, so that their presence here will only seem natural. There will be plenty for them to do. Don’t you think so?’

‘In the face of what you say, undoubtedly.’

‘And I should think they will come, don’t you?’

‘I should think so.’

There was a tinge of unconcern in Barbara's tone which Rowe instantly detected, and which caused him some disquietude.

He had thought of a ready perception in her, and of perhaps some unexpressed form of recognition in look or gesture ; for after the discovery of that forgotten debt, and before the realization of Beza-leel's estate, she had not hesitated to speak to Rowe of her probable action towards the Medlicotts. How much attention he had paid to this he could not himself have gauged, but enough at any rate to inspire him now with a sense of keen disappointment at Barbara's obvious indifference to his proposition. Despite in some respects an extravagant sensibility, Rowe was in others as remarkably obtuse.

It was this perception which finally subdued him. Although they talked for about half-an-hour longer, he was unable to resummon the necessary resolution,

and he knew that he should have to part without effecting one main purpose of the evening. He had not kissed Barbara, and he would certainly have liked to. He had been rehearsing it mentally for several hours. ‘One for friendship!’ was the formula decided upon; but she would not give him the opportunity. He simply bade her good-night in the ordinary way. As he passed along the landing upstairs he heard talking in one of the rooms, but he did not speculate upon the topic of conversation. Very soon he was in bed and asleep.

CHAPTER IV.

THE QUEST.

SUNDRY delicate points arose in the new system of administration necessitated by Rowe's proprietorship. With the old farmer, who was wholly free from the vexatious scruples incident to a more highly organized development, things had been very easily adjusted. He readily met Rowe half-way in the good-natured terms which the latter saw good to impose upon him, and found no difficulty in regarding the re-arrangement merely as

another, and perhaps, in his experience, the supreme, instance of the efficacy of a loan.

‘Just think of it as a mortgage,’ Rowe himself had said to him, ‘with the extra advantage that neither principal nor interest will ever have to be paid off.’

The hint had, of course, appealed to Bezaleel with irresistible force, and when blended with the agreeable fiction which he had himself succeeded in excogitating,—whereby Rowe had become simply the lineal heir to the Winnetts,—the result left nothing at all to be desired.

Barbara found greater difficulty in accepting fictions. To her vision the readjustment looked suspiciously like an unnecessarily ignoble close to a race already sufficiently ignoble, and more than

once a project for escaping some of the more degrading consequences had occurred to her. It was Rowe's desire that things should go on pretty much as heretofore, internally, at any rate, and it was in this that Barbara found some difficulty in acquiescing. Rowe had trusted to his Christmas Eve conversation to settle all that; imagine his consternation, therefore, when only a few days later Barbara approached him with a scheme for her own liberation from the Pool Farm altogether. He stood back with his hand to his forehead, as though he had received an actual blow there. Barbara made no attempt to restrain her laughter.

Now that things were getting fairly established upon the new basis,—Rowe had overhauled the outdoor management as

delicately as might be, and had supplemented his forces by an additional carter and a more competent shepherd than Bezaleel could own to; now that things were more reasonably adjusted, Rowe was again able to devote a portion of his time to such abstruse considerations as his soul loved. After settling the day's programme with old Winnett,—who to do him justice made praiseworthy efforts to fall in with the new order,—Rowe withdrew to his room,—a formerly empty chamber which he had adopted upon Spartan lines to the purposes of a study. Here he occupied himself from ten till one.

He was about to withdraw thither upon the day in question when Barbara assailed him with the result which has been already specified.

‘You stun me, Miss Winnett,’ he said, when he was able. ‘Will you come into the den to talk?’

Thither they repaired, and having put some more coal and wood upon the fire the man lit his pipe.

‘You want to go? I can’t grasp the proposition; I can’t indeed.’

‘Surely it can’t surprise you after all our conversations.’

‘I suppose not,’ replied Rowe, looking at his pipe and fingering the stem nervously. ‘But I thought recent events had somehow affected all that. I don’t know why, I admit.’

‘I am sure I shall never pay you for my keep, Mr. Rowe,’ she said, laughingly.

‘Then of course I shall resell the place immediately,’ continued Rowe, absorbed

in his own train of thought. ‘There is no need to pursue the scheme further.’

‘But surely you have not honoured me with a place in your transcendent scheme?’

‘Unconsciously—I have,’ stammered Rowe. ‘I took it for granted. The thought never definitely occurred to me. I thought, Miss Winnett, from some conversation we had, that you wished to re-establish this farm upon a firmer basis, and then ultimately restore it to the Medicotts. I am sure you led me to understand so.’

Barbara looked at him in questioning astonishment. She failed to perceive the concatenation.

‘Quite possibly,’ she said, ‘but I knew nothing of our hopeless condition. How is it any longer possible?’

‘But I——’ And Rowe checked himself.

The significance of the whole of his mental attitude suddenly, and for the first time, flashed across him. He had been instinctively and unconsciously basing his own plans upon those which he knew to be in Barbara’s wishes. If he actually effected what she wished to effect, would not the result be the same to her and the accomplishing it a delightful advantage to himself? Never before this instant had the enunciation so much as taken the interrogative form. The whole issue had, in fact, been tacitly begged. He was disconcerted by the discovery. Under Barbara’s scrutiny, however, he speedily collected himself.

‘But I wanted to talk with you about

this,' he went on, altering very materially the statement originally intended. 'It is hardly likely that I should wish you to stay here, for my benefit, for nothing. Let us reduce to a minimum the form of our commercial interdependence, but something of the sort necessarily there must be. Name your own terms, Miss Winnett. You felt nothing derogatory in that—that unusual engagement in Knapstone, so I don't think I shall offend you by making a proposition of this kind?'

'You will hardly misunderstand me on that point,' said Barbara, smiling. 'Suppositions of that sort, of course, I don't trouble to provide for. I have made no secret of my idiosyncrasies——'

'No, no, I understand. But don't you think our new methods will make life

tolerable here for a time, just until we get into an established current ?’

They discussed these matters for some time, until an agreement was ultimately come to, by which Barbara was to retain her position at the Pool Farm at least for the indefinite present.

Rowe’s study of the pastoral life as a factor in rational ethics made small progress that particular morning. He had set himself now at first to the task of drawing up a brief historical survey of the agricultural population in Britain, with a view to its presentation to the assembled inhabitants of Murcott by way of general exposition of his attitude towards them and towards the life which they saw him to be taking up amongst them. After this interview with Barbara, he found him-

self unable to fix his mind upon the subject, and he paced the partially carpeted floor of his room in restless meditation.

Yes, he clearly perceived now that he had tacitly identified his own plans and wishes with those of the family in which he had found so strong an interest. He had played so important a part in the discovery of that ugly transaction which he knew to weigh so heavily upon the minds of both Barbara and his friend Diall, that in his good-natured impetuosity he had felt himself equally involved in the moral obligation arising out of it. His peculiar interest in the Medlicott portion also had no doubt rendered the self-delusion more easy, and, although the ultimate adjustment of his wishes to the inevitable practical requirements of the

situation had not so much as occurred to him, he would have been amazed to learn that anything like difficulty could possibly have presented itself in the connection. It precisely was this species of amazement that his conversation with Barbara had aroused in him.

As is common with natures of a like degree of nervous sensibility, Rowe never traced his impulses to their practical conclusion. He saw a gateway in the direction of his ideal goal, and he went through it. What ground lay beyond,—whether quag, impenetrable brushwood, or even gulf unfathomable itself,—he found, when he actually came upon it.

Before twelve, he left his room and went afield. Despite a rapid thaw, there was still much snow on the ground, and he

felt a delight in plunging heedlessly through it. He talked to the boy who was chopping turnips amidst a flock of a hundred sheep, and then went on to where two men were repairing fences. Here he took a hand, and in the necessary muscular exertion he found the solution of many of his problems.

As it was hardly possible to urge stress of dairy work in mid-winter, upon Barbara's advice the engagement of Mrs. Medlicott and her daughter Eulalie was deferred for a month or two. The matter was, however, discussed and settled with them,—then things went on as before. Rowe, in these dark days, devoted much thought to what may be called the educational portion of his schemes, nor was practical outcome wanting. The rector

entered with some interest into the enthusiastic stranger's intentions, and not only gladly placed the school-room at his disposal, but undertook to preside whenever his services were required. Without delay, therefore, Rowe commenced his campaign, and early in January he gave his first address to the villagers. This was the brief historical dissertation already alluded to. It went off well, and Rowe had gone after it to sup with the rector, but when he reached the farm he found Barbara ready to compliment him warmly. Something this time convinced him of her sincerity, and her words gave him a thrill of pleasure,—a different kind from that with which he had received the clergyman's congratulations.

‘Do some good!’ he exclaimed, glowingly.

‘Do you ever admit so much, Miss Winnett?’

‘I do now, for I perceive your investigations have led you to modify your opinions. To-night you actually got so far as to speak of what country life *ought* to be. That is a vital admission.’

‘It is? Ha, ha! As I spoke of it, I saw the expression of your features, and I knew what you were thinking exactly. Yes, I have modified my attitude,—the result chiefly of your assistance. You made me rub my eyes, and I admit now that things rural are not exactly what I once thought them, what, in fact, they are generally thought to be. But I claim potent virtue for the *ought* to be.’

‘There you are safe enough,’ replied Barbara, with perhaps the slightest move.

ment of her shoulders. ‘On that ground you are unassailable, at any rate by me, for it is purely a matter of individual temperament, and upon that I have not the hardihood to dispute. The worst of it is that this *ought to be* generally obscures the vision for what *is*. In nobody more flagrantly than in your prophet Ruskin. That exquisite picture of his which the rector quoted.’

‘Yes, where was it from? I was ashamed to ask Mr. Rathbone.’

‘I will show you directly. Now the writer presents that not as the *ought to be*, but apparently as the *is*; at least, he contrasts it with a presentation of the urban life which is meant to be very particularly the *is*. Is it reasonable to take the most sordid dregs from one phase of life, and a poetical

idealisation of another phase, as types for the purposes of comparison? Let him take his samples from the same relative level, and it is just possible that there might be some difficulty in deciding where the scales dip.'

'You must have an opposition course,' cried Rowe, hilariously.

'Well, is it fair? By ignoring all the offensive aspects of town life, and touching up the rest, couldn't you draw a picture of that state which might even compare favourably with this conventional picture of the country? Ha, ha!' laughed Barbara, airily. 'I have had that paragraph in my note-book ever since I met with it. "The companionship of domestic, the care of serviceable animals, soften and enlarge his life with lowly charities, and discipline

him in familiar wisdoms and unboastful fortitudes." You know who that refers to? Stephen Bovey, your shepherd, and Samuel Such the carter !' And Barbara's laugh was long and resonant,—Rowe at length being constrained to take part in it.

'Have you read Crabbe yet?'

'N—no, I am just getting to him.'

'Get to him quickly. He ought to affect your course of lectures. You spoke to them to-night of their country fare,' said the young lady, becoming suddenly grave. 'I beg you not to do that again. It is a common fallacy, and perhaps the grossest of all.

"Or will you praise that homely, healthy fare,
Plenteous and plain, that happy peasants share!
Oh! trifle not with wants you cannot feel,
Nor mock the misery of a stinted meal,
Homely, not wholesome; plain, not plenteous, such
As you who praise would never deign to touch."

But keep to the ought-to-be, and you are impregnable.'

Rowe blew forth the tobacco fumes in great clouds.

'You are depressing, Miss Winnett,' he said at length, with something like a groan.

'No, no, I must not be that. I don't wish to be that. Perhaps I exaggerate, for the sake of enforcing the bare facts upon you. Your intentions are admirable, and must do good. Enforce your ideal, I assure you that you will be able to obtain the people's interest.'

'It seems to me scandalous that it should have to be done at this time. For what purpose,' said Rowe, warmly, 'have poets and artists,—missionaries we may call them,—for what have they been revealing through

whole centuries the divine secret of a pastoral possibility? I must admit that actualities they do not seem to have indulged in. If you combat their pictures on the point of reality, you will not aim at extinguishing the poetical sentiment which they involve? What is the object of an artist? Not photography, surely. We ought to perceive in their interpretations a rational hope, a sanguine indication of at any rate a possible phase of existence at which we must all aim. Doesn't it seem so to you, Miss Winnett?'

‘By all means,’ said Barbara, quietly, with perhaps some mental reservation.

‘We seem to have taken the rural element for granted,’ continued Rowe. ‘Certainly, I seem to have done so, and I don't think I am solitary in my opinions.

We take these artistic idealisations as strong educational forces in the towns, but the very people whom they most concern are not aware of their existence. It seems to me that for the dwellers in the fields themselves, just as much as for the inhabitants of the slums, is the artist's interpretation essential to the establishment of a rational conception of life ; yet, practically, to present to them the idealism of their situation, to interpret to them the true spirit breathing through their slighted, it seems even repugnant, surroundings, little or no effort was ever made.'

Bezaleel, who had slept soundly in the arm-chair throughout the discussion, now awoke with a start. He looked around him anxiously for a few seconds, then laughed heartily.

‘Well, dash me, Mr. Rowe,’ cried the old man. ‘You have never sold they Cotsol’ tups? I’ve been dreaming as that sermon o’ yours was about the breed o’ sheep, and you were all for the Oxford Downs. “Then that have done for my black-faced lions,” thought I. Ha, ha! But you’ll get to the sheep and beasts next time, mebbe? You’ve a natural tact for preaching, quite.’

87
The farmer took up his tumbler from the hob, and having drunk off its contents, bade them good-night. Almost immediately, ~~thereafter,~~ the other two separated also.

CHAPTER V.

IMPRESSIONS.

THREE months passed, and everything went well. By definite accomplishment Rowe's optimism became intensified, and the country air and labour brought him an unprecedented portion of physical well-being. His complexion began to reflect the health and glow of his animal spirits, as much as did a certain frankness and gaiety of disposition hitherto unknown to him. He felt himself getting back upon life's primary elements, and much of his

exuberance came in mere joyous assertion of this fact. Needless to say, the man had become immensely popular amongst the rustics ; for his benevolent appeal to their intellectual (or let us say emotional) sympathies by no means constituted his only claim to their neighbourly consideration. Naturally, it was the strongest, as Rowe often confidently asserted, and as Barbara, although looking at the speaker with scarce disguised curiosity, did not venture to deny ; and even the few more ignoble methods by which his good nature found secondary outlet, such as largesses in cider, and skimmed milk, and so on, could not materially diminish the effect of it.

Miss Winnett, under an agreement with Diall, had entered upon just as reformed a method of existence. She seemed to

put a whole-hearted energy into her domestic duties, and to be quite free from the gnawing sense of ennui in which, upon Rowe's arrival, he had found her to be immersed. Despite her engagements, she found much time for the most miscellaneous reading, for piano practice, (still necessarily in her father's absence,) and for vivacious discussions with her pragmatic ally. Rowe, himself, had peremptorily forbidden her certain forms of labour, and the ready needle of Eulalie relieved her largely of certain others which were at all times admittedly irksome to Barbara. In fact, an unprecedented flood of life seemed to have made its way into this abandoned old homestead, where, a few months before, had reigned debt, decrepitude, and the devil's kingdom generally.

Roger Diall was a frequent element in their conversation, and, although Barbara could speak of her cousin in a most friendly and nonchalant manner, Rowe, he knew not why, felt vague uneasiness in the contemplation of his genial friend.

‘I could never make out why the man has not married,’ one day Rowe boldly suggested in this connection.

But Barbara was on the eve of thirty, and at no time a servant to her emotional susceptibilities.

‘Do you mean to say that you have lived in intimacy with him, and never had his opinions on that topic,’ she cried, with laughter.

‘Oh, yes, I have had them ; but one is apt to be sceptical towards expressed opinions upon that topic,’ was Rowe’s

reply. 'For to such a wife as he would want, flatly, I don't believe that three hundred a year would offer the sordid aspect which he pretends it would.'

'That of course is a matter of opinion.'

However, Rowe had got Diall's promise to come down to them at Easter, and then no doubt something determinate could be got at. Rowe, himself, had tackled Bezaleel upon the subject.

'What i' the name! You know Roger Diall!' cried Winnett, striking his thistle-spud emphatically into the ground, and looking in amazement at his companion.

It was a breezy March morning, and from the coppice beside them came the strokes of axes chopping the drift-wood. The other laughed, and referred to his own astonishment at discovering the relationship.

‘ ‘St know any good of him, then ?’ asked the old man, in a surly tone.

‘ Yes, a good deal. I know nothing bad, in fact.’

‘ Then you be different from I.’

The conversation from that proceeded with animation. Rowe had learned from Barbara the cause of disagreement, and knew the old farmer to be grossly in the wrong. Scarcely necessary to say that it centred in hard cash. The facts were briefly these. Roger had an only sister, to whom a relation had bequeathed a sum of four hundred pounds, which, at the time of the testator’s death, was in the hands of Bezael Winnett, who, it may be mentioned, was at all times willing to constitute himself banker for any inexperienced female relation. At the moment of the legacy

coming into effect, it chanced that Diall's sister was in delicate health, and had been urgently advised to take a long sea-voyage. But for this legacy the course would not have been practicable, therefore, not unnaturally, Roger had taken immediate steps to obtain the money from his uncle. Bezaleel, in his customary insolvency, had protested the utter impossibility of the thing; but Diall was persistent, came in person to Murcott, and terrific scenes were enacted in the homestead. However, it ended in Winnett's raising the cash somehow, in the sister going abroad, where she died six months later, and, of course, in an impassable gulf between the Pool Farm and a flat in Chelsea from that time forward.

‘Damn it, didn’t I say he’d throw the

money into the sea!’ cried Bezaleel to his daughter, in fury, at the news of the young woman’s death, and was, thereafter, never heard to allude, however indirectly, to the anathematised nephew.

‘I want Diall to come and see me here,’ Rowe at length asserted. ‘Have you any objection to seeing him?’

‘Yes, sir, I have a very great objection. I ’unt see him whatever.’

This was more direct than Rowe had expected, and no persuasion on his part could modify the decision. But he was piqued, and did not mean to abandon his project, so he at length delicately hinted that Bezaleel had better spend Easter at the Kite’s Nest, a farm some way off, which was the residence of the solitary crony that the old insolvent’s exacting methods had

been able to preserve to him. Thus at length it was accommodated, and Roger was to come.

Easter was late, and, contrary to custom, the weather at that season promised to be brilliant. Rowe fetched his friend from the station, and they talked vociferously as they drove homewards in the moonlight. What that first draught of fragrant night air was to the jaded townsman, and what a mystic charm lay in that dim, first glimpse of the tree-clad undulations ! Sounds came on the breeze when, as the horse walked up an incline, they were able to hear them. A dog, a troubled sheep, or a belated partridge ; there, now miles away, the faint roar of the train from which Diall had so recently parted, but from which he

here felt so ludicrously remote. The lantern of a shepherd going to the fold would twinkle across the meadows, and Rowe would talk about the lambs. Was not this enthusiast flagrantly in the right, after all? the townsman could not but instinctively ask himself.

In the Pool Farm all were at rest, save the one who tremulously awaited their arrival. She was giving a last turn to the fragrant chops which hissed before her, and which must be blackened to the exact degree which his epicurean preference demanded. It was long, very long, since Barbara had experienced the mysterious joy which such solicitude affords to the womanly sensibilities. They were done, and—yes, there were the wheels. She ran to the parlour, and threw a rapid glance

over the sumptuously-spread table. The serviettes solemnly erect, (in the form that he had admired,) yes; the ancestral tankard, (which was his favourite,) yes; the this, the that, down to a vase of daffodils, all surveyed in an instant. Nothing was forgotten, then. An irrepressible laugh escaped her, and then to the door.

Nothing but a hand-clasp, for Rowe was at their heels; but greetings uproarious. No theoretic converse this, but one moment's careless abandonment to influences beyond any mere temporal world.

'Be quick,' cried Barbara; and Diall's answer rang from the staircase.

Despite problems—past, present, and to come—that supper was a feast for the gods. In mere material preparations there was extraordinary profusion, but the mer-

riment accompanying far outshone it. Cheeks which had lost the bloom of childhood glowed again, and eyes capable of tragic heaviness sparkled now with flashes of sheer thoughtless glee. When at length they saw good to pause, Rowe got up with a business-like promptitude, and spoke of duty.

‘Going a-fold?’ cried Diall, throwing himself back.

‘I am on duty till one. Don’t disturb yourself. I sha’n’t be long.’

‘Ha, ha! you are making quite a man of him, Barbara,’ said Roger, when the other had gone out. ‘But, come, I must go once more to see the moon through the old pine-tree. You have forgotten all such foolishness, no doubt.’

‘Quite,’ said Barbara, slipping from his

clutch with agility. ‘Go, I will be out in a minute or two.’

That solitary pine-tree in the rick-yard had shared the secrets of these two many years ago, and seemed now to whisper with complacent gladness over the renewal of an intimacy so long interrupted. Diall laid his palm tenderly upon the scaly bark, and looked up at the dark plumes swaying between himself and the moon with a sense of peculiar satisfaction.

‘You seem to be taking some solemn oath,’ said Barbara, seeing his position as she stepped noiselessly to his side.

‘Yes, a good idea, my girl: I was, unconsciously. But you could never leave all this.’

‘Couldn’t I?’ said she, archly.

‘For *that*? You don’t know what it is, dearest. Listen—at this moment in place of that, the rumbling of the latest omnibus, or the rattling of a hansom.’

‘Precisely,—the despicable *that* which alone enables you to perceive the enchanting this. Don’t let us emulate Mr. Rowe, pray.’

‘You still think him mistaken, then?’

‘How shall I answer you? Let us say no, as regards himself, but is not everybody mistaken in imposing individual idiosyncrasies upon everybody else? You might as well institute one fixed and unalterable bill-of-fare for every palate of the human race.’

Diall felt pleasure and surprise. The thoughts which had haunted him since his last glimpse of Barbara were con-

firmed. Evidently he had wronged her, for he had never looked for this degree of development in her. He was made aware of his own intellectual lethargy by the side of it, and gladly acknowledged her proximity a vast stimulus to him.

‘ You will willingly abandon——’

‘ In order the more wholly to love it,’ interposed Barbara, laying her fingers on his lips.

And there was a brief interlude.

‘ We can’t live just as we wish to,’ continued Barbara, bravely, despite obstacles in the way of coherent utterance. ‘ We can’t pretend to blend our various aspirations in ideal proportions. Only wealthy people can do that. I for one don’t, in imagination, adjust my life to any such visionary possibilities. I only want to

take by force such portion of a full life as is open even to a determined, or—as father very expressively puts it—a d——d pauper.’

Diall laughed aloud.

‘And you shall have it, my dear, dear girl. Only you yourself have to say when it shall have a commencement.’

To this she made no answer.

‘You have not sold your books, Roger?’ was her apparently irrelevant exclamation, uttered impulsively.

‘Haven’t I? I have got a hundred pounds in my pocket——’

‘Not the proceeds of that transaction, at any rate,’ Barbara returned, confidently. ‘It would have been an unpardonable piece of Quixotism. Our first impulse was right enough, as a first impulse ; but

you must surely agree with this reconsideration. A mere restoration of the sum defrauded, or even of the farm itself, would, I am convinced, have been a mistaken course under present circumstances. In making reparation *they* must be very seriously taken into account, or else we should only do more injury. There is an art in conferring benefits effectually, and let us proceed warily.'

'You are right, Barbara,—as always ; but, hush ! There he is.'

In an instant, the silence of the moonlight was broken by what seemed to be the resonant whoop of an owl, and the figure of Rowe, which they had seen moving quickly towards the house, stopped in the shadow. The cry was repeated, and Rowe emerged, peering. The dis-

covery was soon made, and they went in noisily.

Rowe, full of the pride of a practical philanthropist, was anxious to show his cynical friend some earnest of his philosophy, and, with this view, he had arranged that one of his popular addresses should take place whilst Diall was with them. There was already a little abatement of the popular ardour towards this particular branch of Rowe's tactics; but he could still attract some of the members of the church choir, and a handful of the elder inhabitants who suffered from the more or less obvious degrees of bodily decrepitude incident to a pastoral old age. These were able to sustain a lively interest in what divers of the poets had thought of

the manifold amenities of their phase of life, and consequently came cheerfully to doze upon the school-room benches, in the gratifying assurance that they were amongst the blest of mortals.

Diall, no doubt, felt criticism of his friend's methods, but he uttered none of it. Rowe's calm trust in human nature was so naïve and implicit, that the more sophisticated might well feel disarmed by it. In one respect, however, Roger received such a measure of unexpected confirmation that he was led to depart somewhat from his intention of entire silence.

As he left the school-room after the meeting, he heard himself addressed by a countryman at his elbow.

‘Mr. Diall, sir.’

Roger turned and faced a young, good-looking man, who displayed some bashfulness at the townsman's keen scrutiny of him. It must have been for a whole minute that he was silently examined, then both men simultaneously exclaimed,

‘Luke Limbrick.’ Thereupon Diall extended his hand to his acquaintance.

It turned out that Luke was desirous of a colloquy, and the two walked on into the deep twilight together.

‘I shouldn't have known you, Luke. Five or six years have made all the difference to you. How are you getting on?’

They talked briefly of the young man's modest, but successful agricultural enterprises, to which his unaided energy had led him.

‘But you'll excuse me taking the liberty

of speaking to you about something else, sir,' said Limbrick, presently. 'We be simple folk hereabouts, as you know as well or better than I, and this Mr. Rowe have made quite a stir in the parish; but may I ask you, sir, if he be a friend of yours.'

'Yes, certainly, I have known him for many years.'

'Then that will do. I doubt I'm mistaken in him.'

'What was your fear?' asked Diall, with increase of curiosity. 'Be plain, we are speaking in strict confidence.'

'To be plain, then, as you say, sir, I've misdoubted him about the women, nothing else. He do seem so uncommon free with 'em that I thought as he meant no good.'

‘ Does that mean that he has come in your way, Luke ?’

‘ If he mean all fair,’ replied the other, evasively, ‘ anybody must take his chance, o’ course.’

‘ I’d give my word for no man in these matters,’ said Diall, ‘ but I should be very much surprised if Mr. Rowe meant anything at all unfair, in fact anything that was not scrupulously honourable. He has always been very strict in such things. But as I have said, Luke, I will pledge myself for no man.’

‘ O’ course not, sir. The wiser man you ; but I’m much obliged to you.’

They then walked on together, again discussing Limbrick’s more material interests. This exactly struck one note of Diall’s individual observation, and the next morning,

as he and Rowe went afield he touched upon it.

‘I see your method takes prominent count of the dairy-maids,’ remarked Diall, drily.

‘How do you mean?’

‘Nothing calumnious ; don’t be alarmed. I mean you don’t debar them the privileges of this method out of any—’

‘It’s just that which lies at the root of the mischief,’ exclaimed Rowe, vehemently. ‘There’s a lot of conventional humbug on that score. I am defying it on principle. In ethics, women are your main forces. You remember Ruskin says—’

‘Yes, yes,’ interposed the other; ‘I remember a good many remarks of his very much to the point.’

‘The proper adjustment of these relations is vital at the outset. Look here, now—’

And Diall did look—to the ground, for a good half hour ensuing, whilst his friend poured out an admirable exposition of the influence of woman in the commonwealth generally, with more detailed reference to that particular portion of it in which he found himself just then especially interested. Roger listened with exemplary patience, but did not again interfere with any detail of the other's tactics.

Throughout those four days Rowe watched Diall closely,—admitted even to himself that he was watching him. He acknowledged to an unaccountable uneasiness at any manifestation of the most obvious mutual understanding between the cousins ; heard with positive irritation any innocent reference to glowing recollections of their intercourse in the past. When

they had music in the evening, it was always Diall that was consulted,—what would he like? *That* was his favourite. Did not he remember how *this*——? What increased Rowe's irritation was a knowledge of his own unreason. One evening,—it was the last,—as the other two talked energetically at the piano of some musical recital which Diall had recently attended at St. James's Hall, Rowe felt the exasperation overpowering. Apart from the general groundwork of unaccountable irritation, he felt the additional consciousness to-night of being left out of the conversation when any abstract point of art became the topic,—he had only then first recognized it, but, as he reviewed rapidly the proceedings of the four days, he saw his perception fully confirmed. He rose

from his chair, and, muttering something of a duty forgotten, left the room. His action and remark passed at the time wholly without observation, but in a few minutes Roger awakened to the situation. He glanced round the room, then took Barbara's hand which had been lying idle upon the keyboard whilst they talked.

‘Come with me to-morrow, darling; come, and have done with it.’

This sudden action on the part of the calm, staid Roger startled her, and, without knowing what she did, Barbara snatched away her hand; but the next moment, with a blush and laugh, she replaced it.

‘No, no, dear boy, not yet. I must stick to my bargain.’

‘With Rowe?’

‘Yes. He has been very good, and he

imagines that my presence is useful at present, which indeed, perhaps, it is.'

'He is under no delusion, Barbara?'

'What? With regard to me? Ha, ha! Have no fear of that.'

'I have thought that I might as well tell him all; but, if you feel so sure of this, I will leave it. We can surprise him some morning by showing him the ring. Doesn't he show any definite preference? His general attitude I observe.'

'Not here. General flirting he is developing rapidly, but that seems to be part of his scheme.'

'So he tells me. Which of the girls is Luke Limbrick after?'

'I can't say. Nobody here that I know of.'

Rowe, in the meantime, had gone out, to find the rick-yard white in the moonlight, with black geometrical shadows sharply cut over its surface. He passed over to one of them, one thrown from a great oblong stack of fragrant hay,—doubly fragrant now in the chill night air,—and in the obscurity which it afforded he paced to and fro unobserved. Sundry annoying problems were assailing him, but any irritation arising from the attitude of those two had been instantly dissipated. He was genuinely attached to both of them, and, in short, it was extremely improbable that there was a single straw of foundation for his disquieting surmises. If, indeed, there were—ah, well, it could be considered when established.

He found his spirit soothed to a mere

careless acquiescence by the sacred unworldliness of the scene which he surveyed. He pressed his back against the hay, and looked at the great thatched barn which rose at some distance there before him, in the roof of which the white patches of new straw, chronicling repairs effected by himself, glistened conspicuously. Yes, he acknowledged a feeling of intense delight in this still novel sense of actual possession. Every stone and straw was his—or hers? Hers, undoubtedly; for her had he acquired them; for her, or for the effecting of such wishes as should actuate her generous soul, for effecting them through him. There lay the charm of the possession, assuredly.

A movement then aroused him from his reverie; a shadow moving, for the black,

prostrate shadow was more conspicuous to his view than the body which occasioned it. He too moved to the farthest corner of the rick without emerging from the obscurity which screened him. Then he recognized the shadow.

‘Miriam!’ he said, in a full-blown whisper. ‘Miriam!’

Figure and shadow stopped, for an instant only, peered, heard the voice again, and became merged in that obscurity which was screening him.

‘What are you out for now?’ he said, putting his hand upon her shoulder, and trying to scan her features in the dusk. ‘Tell me; you are not afraid of me,’—the back of his fingers touched the cool soft bloom of her cheek, but she gave no answer. ‘Do you too feel the need of this foolish

love?' he asked, so earnestly, and with his lips so close to her ear, that she felt his breath upon her face. 'Do you, Miriam?'

'But I don't love him, sir. I have told him so to-night,' she said.

'Who?'

'Luke Limbrick.'

'Poor Luke! Then who do you love? Who? Tell me.'

'I don't know, sir.'

'Then you may as well love Luke,' laughed Rowe, suddenly removing his hand. 'Run in, you silly girl, and mind you take care of yourself, for those pretty cheeks are tempting.'

Rowe went in, took a part in song, and he and Diall talked late into the night.

The following morning Rowe awoke to all his former vivacity. Barbara drove her cousin to the station, and all went on as before.

CHAPTER VI.

LIGHT AND SHADE.

EASTER, then, had come and gone, and Rowe was obliged to admit that he had reaped no new conviction from the festival. But, if not conviction, therefore neither repulse; for to his sanguine temperament a mere doubt invariably meant the advantageous aspect of it. He plunged again gaily into all the spring farm-work, and with the exhilarating progress of his natural surroundings he found his theoretical instincts confirmed and deepened. As he

gazed at the earliest sunbeams playing amidst the blossom-laden boughs of his orchard, and piercing in places to the frost-glistening grass beneath, amidst which the blackbirds bounded; or as he walked home, to the blackbird's evensong, and saw the last golden ray creep upwards until the cock on the church steeple had gone out, until the budding elms had lost their crown, until the hill-tops were dun, and at last the purple clouds all dead—could he doubt but that here indeed lay the amaranthine fields, that from such as this alone could emanate the heavenly alchemy owning power to tame the restless soul of man?

One evening, when returning so, he found Eulalie alone in the corner of the orchard. What she had been doing there

was not apparent; but as her face was turned westwards when he first perceived her, and as her disposition was well known to him, he presumed, with considerable satisfaction, that her occupation had been the same as his.

‘ You are too fond of being alone, my dear girl,’ said Rowe, nevertheless, when he came up to her. ‘ Are you quite contented here?’

She only answered him with her eyes,—with a look of mingled inquiry and astonishment. He laughed, and turned away to a cherry-tree in full bloom beside him. He cut a twig, and let it dangle in his hand.

Eulalie’s heart leaped at his movement, but after a few more words he turned his back upon her, and went off humming to

the house. Ten minutes afterwards she was still gazing in the direction he had taken as if expecting his return, but twilight deepened and she was still alone.

Barbara was in the window-seat reading when Rowe entered.

‘Destroying your eyes, Miss Winnett,’ he said, taking a seat beside her, according to his wont. ‘You never ought to read in a waning light. The sunset has escaped you unobserved, I expect.’

‘It has,’ she replied, just raising her eyes from the book in her hand.

‘The influence of that, then, mind, has escaped you for ever.’

‘I am afraid so.’

‘If this could have held it I should have saved it for you ; a short time ago it was marvellously illumined.’

‘I expect so,’ said Barbara, without a movement of her features, as she took the sprig of cherry-blossom ; ‘thank you.’

‘I fancy Eulalie is wiser than you.’

‘You have said so before, and I am sure I have not a doubt of it. I lay no claim to wisdom.’

‘I wonder what you would lay claim to if you uttered your secret convictions? Do tell me!’

‘I should like to know myself,’ said Barbara, laughing. ‘I am afraid that I principally disclaim.’

‘Yes, I am afraid you do. But surely there is something you would claim, isn’t there?’

She was idly brushing her chin with the blossom, and a few petals fell like flakes into her lap.

‘Plenty of things——’

‘Ha, yes, but I don’t mean depreciatory. Excuse me.’

A little green caterpillar which he had seen mounting her shoulder had now reached the hair at the side of her neck, so he stretched forth his fingers to remove it. She permitted it without a movement.

‘Will you answer me a question unreservedly?’ he then said, with some suspicion of impulsiveness.

‘Unreservedly,’—and she looked at him with the most easy frankness.

‘Has anything ever led you to suspect that Eulalie has—well, say, has mistaken my attitude towards her?’

‘Nothing. I should hardly think it likely.’

‘You wouldn’t? Ha, I am glad of that.’

I am rather sensitive on those points, and I feared that, seeing her peculiar temperament, perhaps I had been rather injudicious, you know. I have always felt it impossible, and I am very glad of your assurance. She is a singular child.' So they talked until the lamp was brought in.

Eulalie had meanwhile left the orchard and come with hesitation towards the house. When she reached the back door, the sounds of the women gossiping in the kitchen checked her, and again she turned away. She could not just now face that. She fled across the yard with marvellous silence and rapidity for one encumbered as she was, and, by the corner where all the wood was stacked, she passed through a wicket into a paddock beyond.

This silent twilight was congenial to her, and whilst standing to recover her breath she heard with singular appreciation the lonely call of a partridge somewhere at hand. Despite the mad longings of her heart, longings too which had been as by miracle confirmed in her, she could not hug her joy without a tremor. Moments like this would come sometimes, when hidden fears found a brief ascendancy. Generally succeeding, too, such an insignificant incident as on this occasion. But she had felt so sure of it to-night, that the repulse was no doubt of exceptional intensity. He had, of course, his motives for delay, but just a little action would so greatly have encouraged her, without impelling her (she was sure) to anything unreasonable. She had lived so long now

upon that fragment of Christmas Eve, that it was getting perhaps a little strained. Heigh-ho! Not once since had he repeated the frolic. Sometimes, indeed, it seemed as though such had never been. But no, that at least was impossible. He had his causes for delay. He, like a mere ordinary mortal! He, like those coarse, heartless rustics that could kiss her and make sport! Did not the mere proposition answer itself enough?

Then it was not a cow; for Eulalie had for some seconds been conscious of a movement beyond the hedge. Instinctively, if hardly specifically, she had accepted the sound as proceeding from such a cause; but of a sudden she was aroused. Across a gap in the hedge just before her, filled by a hurdle, a human figure had passed, a

figure immediately recognizable as that of old Farmer Winnett. He had not seen her, evidently, although he had passed at a slow pace. At the back of the hedge, corresponding to the position of the girl, she heard his step cease, and simultaneously a groan.

‘Pauper; damned pauper, at last,’ followed, articulately, rather vehemently.

Eulalie was afraid, and made no movement. After uttering this ejaculation, Bezaleel passed the gap again, and walked a little way. He then retraced his steps, muttering, but the girl could not distinguish the words. She was not a child in all things, so had no difficulty in interpreting the behaviour of the old man. It surprised as much as it pained her. She now only sought to escape, and, seizing a

moment when she calculated that he was at the farthest point, she hastened to the gate and passed through. She was frightened upon beholding the old farmer not three yards away from her.

He turned.

‘ You, Lalie !’ he cried. ‘ What i’ the name be you a-studyin’ of ?’

Clearly there was nothing else for it, however opposed to the sensitive girl’s principles.

‘ I forgot to look for the eggs in the orchard to-night, sir ;’—he could not distinguish the colour of her face.

They walked on together, and reached the house without any other word being spoken. The clatter was still proceeding in the kitchen, so Eulalie found cause to linger whilst Bezaleel went on to the

parlour ; then she crept quietly up the stairs.

Winnett frowned and looked angrily at the lamplight, but took his chair without speaking. He flung off his boots, took the slippers from his daughter's hands without comment, she conversing with Rowe the while, and then grumbled for his supper. These moods had not been common of late, but they were not unknown, and Rowe had discovered how to treat them,—that is, by the negative method of refraining from treatment altogether.

Meanwhile a candle had been lighted in the bed-room appropriated to Eulalie and her mother, and the blind drawn down. The girl had peeped into her sister's room as she passed it, and now looked cautiously

about this one, leaving the door ajar. The bottom drawer of a chest she opened noiselessly, and drew from beneath the clothing which was in it, a wooden box labelled 'Cadbury's Chocolate.' Glancing again nervously around her, she opened the lid and removed a white silk handkerchief, thus displaying a green wreath of laurel leaves which lay in the bottom. The colour of the leaves was so well preserved, and in the candle-light the wrinkles in them so imperceptible, that it seemed strange that they should rustle so harshly as she took them from the box, and should remain so rigid between her fingers.

But they had no harshness or insensibility for this beholder; for her they were as green and flexible as when gath-

ered from the branches, nay, incomparably more so, for had not her passionate joyous tears imparted a peculiar life to them, a sacred vitality surpassing surely the mere life of tissue and chlorophyll which the heartless rain, the pitiless snow, had been able to grant them? Her eyes were full even now, and after raising her lips from the treasure, the consecrated thing was richer by two glistening diamonds than it had been but a moment before.

Pressed and dried, forsooth! Not if so many insensate botanists had each had a leaf of it, and swore by gum-paper and exherbario to the specimen. It was *Laurus botanicus* no longer; a species now altogether distinct from that, which Linnaeus and his followers have not recorded for us.

Eulalie handled it daintily, lovingly. She poised the candle-stick skilfully on the top of the looking-glass, and then paused for an instant. No sound of the house could have come to her, and there was nothing else to cause her disturbance. Mad glee sparkled from those glittering pupils as she placed the crown upon her own fair head. She? Ah, no, not she herself was doing it,—not these poor needle-jagged fingers—white and delicate enough though they were for the office,—not these, nor such as these, placed the trophy here, now or at any time. Poor indeed were the spectacle in that case, and of small attraction for such as Eulalie.

It was in this moment that the girl's life now centred, from it alone that she gathered courage for her daily journey. It

was the vestal fire by which she sat, and whence alone emanated the warmth necessary to her soul's existence. The secret was her own,—and his. Yes, his assuredly; how could she have a doubt of that? What were the secret to her otherwise? What indeed! He had not repeated it; it was true that he had not, but he had his reasons. Had not his eyes since spoken more plainly than speech? Down to this very latest hour, had they not? Could a lie be in them?

In the midst of her palpitating joy, Eulalie swept the wreath from her head, so quickly and yet so tenderly. It touched her lips on its way to its hiding-place, and by the time the footstep was at the door something different engaged her.

‘Whatever be you doing here, Lalie?’

cried Miriam, coming in to her. ‘Mother be quite fidgety about you.’

‘Silly mother,’ said the other, playfully. ‘I was coming down. Is it supper-time?’

Then the two girls descended in company.

‘Do you think Master Winnett broods much over his misfortunes?’ asked Eulalie of her mother later, when they were alone together, and composed for the night.

‘Poor man, I can’t think as ur do, Lalie. The gentleman be so good to ’em an’ all. It med have been different with him if he’d had to leave the old place, of course, for he be proud, be Master Winnett. But I’m sure no gentleman could behave better to him than Mr. Rowe.’

‘I’m sure of that, too,’ replied the girl,

readily. ‘But the old man must feel the change. He knows the place is not his own.’

‘But he have not been a man for fretting himself over-much, that be one thing. He won’t feel it a deal.’

But of that Eulalie was not so sure, and she pondered over it as she lay awake in the darkness.

From the supper-table Bezaleel had gone to his bed-room, but, to the violation of all precedent, not to bed. Having kicked the slippers from his feet, he paced the floor restlessly. In a few minutes he flung himself upon the bed, clothed as he was, and did his utmost to invoke sleep. The faculty, which had never in the whole of his recollection failed him, was to fail

him now. He tried one side, then another, and at length, instead of getting angry as the occasion seemed to demand, he became alarmed. He reviewed himself rapidly, lying on his back staring into the dark. The situation was novel, and called forth treatment just as strange. Introspection was not the farmer's weakness, but obviously he was attacked by it to-night. He must be ill, although conscious of no ailment. Local precedents were rapidly recalled. There was James Forebred who died a week ago, the latest. He went afield, but for days brought back untouched the victuals which his wife had sent with him. To quiet her alarm at such a practice, James gave the food away, and the good wife was reassured by the empty basket. But the other, James

could not cheat. Within a fortnight he was dead.

‘But I beunt off my victuals!’ cried Bezaleel, starting up, and smacking his lips to recall more vividly the supper he had just eaten. ‘Never was off my victuals in my life; could always eat a deal, and hearty.’

To the old man, genuine rustic that he was, this was incontrovertible proof. However, he could not sleep, but that was a secondary matter. Local solicitude laid not such stress upon that. Presently he got out again, and lit the candle; for some time he paced the floor.

In the course of his ruminations, he flitted, by some subtle and unfamiliar process, from physical to spiritual diagnosis. If it was not the one, could

it possibly be the result of the other?

‘I’ve not been the man I med,’ he admitted, audibly: ‘that I haven’t;’ and, instantly, words of the late Jonathan Medlicott, the ranter, came back to him. ‘Poor Jonathan, he broke his neck at last; but that needn’t ha’ been wi’ the ranting, o’ course.’

After some more similar speculation, Bezaleel stopped before the great chest of drawers, looking unusually sheepish. A few books were piled up on it, a large folio at the bottom. He looked at them, then around the room. Ultimately, with the feeling and aspect of an untrained pick-pocket trying an apprentice hand, he pulled out that portly bottom book. He opened it and brought the candle over to his side. Of the arrangement of the contents of

this volume he remembered little that was definite, nor was he conscious of any preferences if he had done so. Presumably one page was as efficacious as another, so why not accept this opening which had come to him by chance? Here goes!

At the first glance he was startled,—confronted by his own name! He had understood that his name was Biblical, but had never grasped the fact as a reality, and now read with real avidity of his Semitic namesake who was filled ‘with the spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship,’ and to whom, consequently, was entrusted sundry important works.

He thought vastly better of himself after the perusal, felt exhilaration from the

spiritual exertion, and in a momentary forgetfulness of realities he began to undress.

Barbara was alarmed to perceive a light under her father's door, and to hear sounds in his room, when she came up to bed. So greatly so that she was constrained to stop and inquire.

‘All right, maidie,’ replied the old man, cheerily. ‘I be all right. Good-night.’

Reassured she passed on; but she was struck by the incident, and perhaps more by the tone of her father's answer, and the use of that very long-disused term of endearment, and it was some time before she slept.

In the morning it was explained. Bezael did not appear at breakfast, and Barbara's fears were instantly re-awakened.

She ran to his room, and found him unable to get up and speechless. When the doctor arrived from Withbridge, he announced the old man to be suffering from a slight apoplectic stroke, with no immediate cause for alarm.

CHAPTER VII.

BARBARA'S ADVICE.

DESPITE all methods of elusion or delusion, it is hard for a proud stubborn man to be called upon to admit that he has been worsted in a contest with fate. Old Winnett had doubtless suffered more by that sudden upheaval in his affairs than even he himself was at all aware. The transaction might, without difficulty, be construed into a perpetual loan; Rowe as easily become the direct heir to the estate; but the skeleton fact lurked behind, and

would require all Bezaleel's ingenuity, inherited and acquired, wholly to elude that. The very relief which it had brought to him proved a traitor to his cause. Relief from what? Sordid and ignoble tricks and cares undoubtedly, but such, nevertheless, as by constitution and custom were now an indispensable part of the man's existence. That removed, he was thrown purposeless upon a world in which he had no place or portion. You might as well deprive a hardened old gambler of the wherewithal to play, justly assuring him that you are relieved of endless torment by substituting love for stakes.

The old man's illness, however, was of short duration, and by the time the hay was cut he was found taking his place in the field again. But a change was dis-

cernible in him, obvious to all. Not merely physical, for the weakness of his arm he was able to dissemble; it was a more subtle change than that. Of what nature is perhaps best evidenced by the fact that labourers who worked beside him felt able to crack their heavy uncomplimentary jokes upon him in his hearing, and reservedly he shared the laugh. This was wholly without precedent in the history of Bezaleel Winnett.

Another and, if possible, more flagrant instance of the change, was a sudden toleration evinced by him for music. It was first betrayed in rather a remarkable manner.

The weather being peculiarly favourable to hay-making, every hand was pressed into the service, and the day's food con-

sumed under the shadow of the waggons. Rowe, setting much store by example, shared the lot of his men, and consequently provided provender for the whole. The occasion was thus effectually 'improved,' to the edification of everybody, and the protracted labours of the hay-time took at the Pool Farm much of the form of a sociable picnic. Larder and cider butts ebbed appreciably, but spirits and good-fellowship rose in more than a merely proportionate degree. It followed, therefore, that whatever difficulty the district generally was experiencing in the matter of labour, Rowe was a stranger to it. More services were eagerly placed at his command than his few acres enabled him to make use of.

Bezaleel was amongst the blithest, entering (intermittently, it is true,) into the

roistering mirth with a glee that was child-like. One day he was especially jubilant. It was afternoon. They were seated at their *al fresco* festival, all in various stages of more or less primitive undress. The cider bottles were in brisk circulation, and the buzz of tongues in varying cadences kept concert with the flies and wasps. Rowe, in his flannel knickerbockers and boating-shirt, lay indolently on one elbow, munching, or sipping, or anon playfully whisking with his handkerchief a wasp from Miriam's face or fingers. The shaggy old horses stood by patiently dozing in the shade, with their heads drooping, and dishevelled manes covering their faces, indifferent to everything, too indolent even to nibble. They had placed themselves in pairs, the head of one to the flank of an-

other, so that every movement of a tail served as a fan to the face behind it.

Winnett was laying down dogmatically the earliest recorded date for carrying the hay, in his parish at any rate, and from that got to the bulk of individual crops. Others were talking of hay-field feats and accidents,—loads overturned for being badly built, necks broken, sunstrokes suffered, and the like ; but all alike leading to good-humoured disputation and argument.

‘Aw, ’twere a bad fall o’ Tom Dufty’s,’ said one, assenting to a previous speaker.

‘In a manner it were, Gearge ; but then ’tweren’t the fall as hurt un.’

‘What were it then, Thomas ?’

‘Ur told I hisself as ’tweren’t the fall,’ replied the other, with stern gravity, ‘but

'twere the knock on the ground as did it.'

'Aw, well, there beant much difference at last.'

'That be true an' all, Gearge. But what be 'em a-doing yonder. One o' them travelling musicians, I count, by the sound of 'em. We med have he down here to give we a tune, eh?'

But the strains had also reached the ears of Bezaleel Winnett. Now, to Rowe's certain knowledge, if there was one form of musical expression more exasperatingly loathsome to the old man than another, it was, or at least had been, the notes of a barrel-organ. His present action, therefore, was surprising. He had pricked up his ears as at a most joyous sound, to the interruption even of an emphatic utterance which he was in the act of enunciating.

‘That be all as we want here, Mr. Rowe, eh?’ exclaimed the farmer, with a jubilant expression. ‘I can see as Miriam be a-dying for a turn with ’ee; eh, maidie?’

‘Oh, Master Winnett!’ came in a girl’s tones, but the general outburst of approval immediately drowned it.

‘We can have a tune, whether or no,’ said Rowe, lazily. ‘Fetch him down, Billy.’

The boy addressed jumped to his feet with alacrity, and ran off without waiting for further instructions.

‘Howd on, Billy!’ shouted a facetious one. ‘’St knaw what ’ee bist agwine for?’

‘Ur’ll ha’ forgot afore ur’ve gode six yards,’ interposed another.

‘Tie his memory to his leg, then,’ cried old Winnett, and amidst the burst of

laughter the boy's response was inaudible.

The itinerant musician was without difficulty persuaded to join them. Bezaleel handed him a pot of cider as a preliminary greeting, and he drank the health of all. Then he plied the handle.

Despite Winnett's incessant pleasantry, nobody could be induced to dance. This one was too hot already ; this one wanted to eat, this to drink. Bezaleel dared not make the effort, else he would have led them off himself.

‘ Well, I thought better of you, Mr. Rowe,’ exclaimed the old farmer at length in real dudgeon. ‘ There be Miriam going to cry, look ’ee. Take her out, John. What i’ the name ! I mind the day when I was a boy——’

Rowe had raised himself up into a sit-

ting posture, and Miriam shot a quick glance at him instantly. Before he had had time to disclose what might be his further intentions, an altogether fresh figure stepped round the end of the waggon, and took his stand in front of the girl most frequently referred to. She raised her eyes to him, as did everybody else present.

‘May I have a turn with you, Miriam,’ said this new-comer.

‘Dash me, Luke be worth the whole pack of you,’ exclaimed Bezaleel. ‘Now, Miriam, get up.’

Others, too, joined their voices, but not until Rowe’s was clearly audible did the bashful girl rise. As Limbrick led her on to the open grass, Rowe took one of the other women and followed, and another

took the third. Thus they danced in the sunlight.

The piece of ground which Limbrick cultivated adjoined this field, and throughout the day he had been an interested observer of his neighbour's doings. He could have detailed, with completest accuracy, every movement of Miriam's since her arrival in the morning, with especial reference, perhaps, to her relative propinquity to this or that of the other workers. When the pink figure was alone, he had been well aware of the fact, and able to proceed zealously with his occupation; but when a figure in white flannel and a straw hat approached her, he was restless and unable to work.

Luke Limbrick was the characterless

man of the village, a man without apparent flaw. Nobody knew anything but good of him. His father had been a notorious drunkard and poacher, a man with a history, but he died ultimately in a ditch, having tripped over one of his own hare snares when intoxicated,—and Luke had since kept his mother and himself in respectability by his enterprise in the rector's allotments. The rector called him his henchman, and foretold vast parochial possibilities for the youth.

From the outset, Luke had felt instinctive distrust of Rowe; perhaps did not like the hap-hazard method of his introduction to the district. He himself, at any rate, was not in the habit of following young women he chanced to meet in a railway-carriage, and settling down in-

definitely in their neighbourhood to a calling for which he was not at all fitted. The enthusiast's ethical proclivities had never re-assured him. Seeing, indeed, that they were not accredited by direct association with the established and customary channel for such enterprise, he rather disliked them. He had talked unreservedly to his patron about them, and, latterly, at any rate, the clergyman had secretly acknowledged the countryman's sagacity.

His attentions to Miriam Medlicott were only a renewal of a partiality professed before that young woman had left her native district,—a renewal admittedly under less advantageous circumstances than at that former period. Then, there had been no obvious obstruction confront-

ing him ; he was unable to feel that such was the case now. But that was by no means the issue.

Needless to say that, to one of Luke's unimpeachable instincts, mere personal considerations of this quality were allowed but insignificant place in the prospect. The effect to himself mattered nothing ; but for the future of Miriam he was prepared to do battle. Upon this point he was genuinely alarmed. In the light of subsequent development, even Diall's assurance had no power to appease. To it, indeed, the whole of Limbrick's observation was opposed, and that by no means indirect observation merely.

From his point of vantage, then, he had watched the proceedings of the day, closely and anxiously. Sundry efforts he had

made to be something more than a mere watcher, but the fates had not awarded him much result; perhaps they had endowed Miriam with an exceptional measure of craft for the nonce, for the sole purpose of making themselves sport. It was not the hedge that was at fault, for it was as level and trim as the most advanced agriculturist could desire.

The arrival of the musician at length gave Luke such opportunity as he desired. The conditions were so exceptional that no surprise could be occasioned by a neighbour intruding to take a part. With such intention, the man climbed the fence and strode resolutely across the field. All were so intent upon the fun that his approach was unobserved. Behind the waggon he paused, for Bezaleel's banter was at that

moment at its highest. It was only when the appeal had been for so long made in vain, and Rowe at length showed that questionable movement, that restraint became impossible, and Luke stepped forth.

Round and round they spun, despite the irregularity of the ground and the height of the thermometer. Bezaleel and the rest looked on, sipping their cider contentedly, and urging the dancers from time to time by their applause. As each pair approached them, the perspiration could be observed literally pouring from their temples, but through it beamed the most exhilarating smiles. Except in the case of Miriam. Her face was heated, but without a smile. She seemed to be going through the ordeal as a mere melancholy duty, and, although

her partner spoke to her occasionally, he could elicit no reply. At length her lips were parted, only to articulate an entreaty to be relieved from her irksome situation. It was at this moment that Barbara arrived, enticed, as Luke had been, by the extraordinary proceedings. To her a barrel-organ was irresistible, but not as an incitement to the dance. Old Winnett's gibes were lost on her, and she reclined in graceful indolence upon the grass.

Scarcely knowing it, Miriam cast herself down beside her, and buried her face instantly in a heap of hay lying there. Limbrick took a seat there too, but Bezaleel's imperious summons compelled him to remain, in order to partake of the fare over which the old man presided.

‘Not bait ’ee after that there!’ cried he, indignantly. ‘Come here, man! You set the ball a-rolling. They’d ha’ done nothing without ’ee. Never heed the maid; let her have a blow, and she’ll be ready for ’ee straight.’

Although deprecating the farmer’s facetious humour, Luke, if only to escape further annoyance, was constrained to give in, and he went over to take the mug stretched out for his acceptance.

‘I hate it!’ Barbara distinctly heard, in an agonized tone, from that pile of hay at her side.

In amazement she glanced down at it; surely the form was Miriam’s, but the utterance——? She listened attentively, even leaning down, in a manner to excite no attention, so as to catch any slight-

est sound, but none was audible. The music still proceeded, and the mirth.

‘You have done too much, Miriam,’ said Barbara, quietly.

The girl looked up, hay-seeds and a fragment of a brown thistle-leaf adhering to her face, but she said nothing. The other viewed her critically.

‘What’s it all about?’

Did Miriam herself know? It is extremely doubtful. She was not in the habit of formulating impressions even to herself, and the present one was absolutely new to her. She could only definitely perceive the effect of it.

‘I don’t like this, Miss Barbara,’ she said, like a child about to cry.

‘You seem different from the others. Everybody else is enjoying it. Why

did you dance if you didn't wish to?"

‘Mr. Rowe told me to.’

Miriam had now taken up a dry grass stalk, and was nibbling it. Rowe himself came up at that moment panting beside them, and threw himself down.

‘Why, Miriam, you’re nothing of a dancer!’ he exclaimed. ‘Miss Winnett, do come and have a turn. I’m half-dead, but your coolness would refresh me. Do, now, please!’

He had not so much as looked at the other girl, but she had fixed her eyes upon him. Barbara, whilst acknowledging the compliment, politely declined. He urged her, but it was of no avail.

‘I can’t ask you, Miriam, for you seem exhausted already. I will go and refresh, then we must to work again. If it will

hold up to-morrow, we shall finish.' And away he went jauntily.

'You were not too exhausted, though ; were you ?' asked Barbara of her companion, when they were alone.

'I don't think so. I feel rested now.'

Presently Rowe dismissed the organist with extravagant largesse, and the latter no doubt made a complimentary note of the establishment for future use. Such were not common on his route. When the signal was given for work, one by one they arose indolently from the ground and indulged in a preliminary shake. The slumbering horses became aware of the general movement, and shook themselves also. In the pastoral state one cannot but be constantly struck by community of trait in

man and beast. Common nature becomes more apparent in this primitive condition.

Barbara lingered to indulge her curiosity. She could not but instantly acquit Rowe of any intentional levity, but she felt rather angry with the theory. Clearly it contained the elements of much possible mischief which hitherto she had not sufficiently discerned. As Rowe passed her to lead the men, she walked a few paces beside him.

‘Just glance casually at Miriam for the next half-hour,’ she said; ‘without exciting observation, of course. We will speak of the result to-night.’

He gave her a significant look, not perhaps wholly at his ease, but ultimately smiled and nodded.

The men were preparing to load; the

three women were proceeding to some little distance with their rakes. Miriam walked alone behind the other two, these advancing in riotous gossip. Limbrick made no secret of his intention, and quickly overtook his partner. As both Barbara and Rowe observed, however, they went but a few paces together; then the man went off to his own land. The interview had been short, but sufficiently long to disquiet Luke for the remainder of the day. Miriam's mood was a novel one, and was evidenced by novel conduct.

'I won't speak to you,' three times reiterated had been her gallant's reward, so that his retreat perhaps was pardonable.

For the rest of the evening Rowe also was meditative. He attached all sorts of imaginary significance to Barbara's few

words to him, and, to say truth, felt little eagerness for the promised debate. But surely he could not be deceiving himself. What made him nervous? He asked himself the question. He was conscious of—of no impropriety. Why, then, should he feel—yes, a fear, in this connection? Indeed, now, upon once more reviewing it, how was he himself in any way implicated in her reflection? If she had intended the least hint of censure against himself, was she likely to have adopted this method of conveying it?

Such were the thoughts which engaged him through the twilight, and by dint of them he restored himself to a greater degree of self-assurance. Their labours amongst the hay were protracted long beyond the time of sunset, but as the

clock was nearing ten the last load for the night had been ricked. The women had gone long since, so that any preparatory words with Miriam were denied him if he wished them. As they all rode up in the waggon, he sat silent, looking at that bright evening star sinking red to the north-western horizon, and only conscious of the dull bass monotone which to his regardless ear the talk of the rustics became. Bats flitted constantly between his eye and the glow lingering in the north, but they made no sound to disturb the solemnity which characterized the hour.

He assumed a peculiarly nonchalant manner in Barbara's presence, and at a fitting moment himself made a point of opening the promised conversation in a jocular vein.

‘By-the-by, I followed your behest. I came to no definite conclusion ; did you ?’

‘I certainly did. Number 1, that Limbrick is paying attentions to Miriam. That is new to me.’

‘Oh, is it? I had had a hint of that before.’

‘Number 2, that his suit is in an unprosperous condition.’

‘I guessed you would infer this. Proceed warily. Are not country girls coy?’

‘Miriam’s behaviour did not arise from coyness. I have the advantage, for I saw more than you. You once asked me a question with regard to Eulalie and yourself,—has a similar thought ever occurred to you with regard to Miriam?’

‘Impossible!’

‘It is the case,’ asserted Barbara, confidently.

‘What? That Miriam—can possibly—’

‘That Miriam has rather more than a kindly feeling for *you*, and that this checks Luke’s progress.’

Rowe laughed derisively.

‘My dear Miss Winnett, you will make me vain. Miriam! I won’t believe that the weak little chit is capable of such impression, to say nothing of myself being—ha! ha!’

But Barbara remained serious.

‘In all earnestness I beg you not to treat it so. I am convinced that she is impressionable, and, what is more, has been impressed. We must do what we can to remove the impression.’

‘But she cannot possibly regard it practically. I have never led her—do you think I have ever given her

the slightest ground for such an idea?’

‘That, unfortunately, is hardly the point. The idea distinctly she has got, and the only question is how to awaken her to the folly of it. It ought not to be trifled with for a moment. It might cause the girl unspeakable wretchedness.’

‘Yes, I fully agree with that,’ said Rowe, after a moment’s reflection; ‘granting, that is, your original premises. I had better speak a kindly word or two myself. Don’t you think so?’

‘That, I think, would be best; and to be done promptly.’

‘Without a day’s delay . . . But, if she is capable of this impression, how on earth could it for a moment survive? Hasn’t she eyes?’

Barbara looked up inquiringly, and met

his gaze. Rowe had been conscious of a quivering of the lips in his last utterance, and knew of the expression upon his face now ; but to the listener they came as a thunderbolt. So confounding, so horribly alarming if confessed, that there was no escape save by a bold repudiation of one's senses. Barbara proved equal to the effort, and wholly ignored the suggestion they had made. In a moment she disbelieved it.

‘ It is there and has survived,’ she said, curtly, at the same time rising from her chair ; ‘ do your utmost to remove it.’

Rowe's courage had fled before this cold repulse, and he merely promised prompt obedience. In a minute or two Barbara left him.

CHAPTER VIII.

EFFECTS.

Rowe's faith in the creed which finds moral and spiritual satisfaction in life's more primitive aspects, had grown daily in intensity, and, as already pointed out, his physical development had kept full pace with it. He had even advanced so far in the elementary virtues as to find pleasure in the saddle, and except during this temporary stress of occupation with the hay he was to be seen any day in that peculiarly wholesome aspect of spiritual aban-

donment which is presented by a man in full canter on the turf. But, as is usual in cases of confirmed faith, the taste for examination of its speculative principles quickly assumed an inverse ratio to the desire for the practice of them. The conviction arising from actual experience, Rowe very properly thought, was more conclusive than the most irrefragable argument.

His course of historical investigation was, therefore, little by little being abandoned, and the main conclusions which were to be deducible from it taken as established. He had, throughout his life, read quite enough to know that in his conclusions he was by no means in ignoble company. The conditions and restraints of a complex civilization, material and

intellectual, were not only, negatively, mere vanity and vexation of spirit, but were, positively, demoralizing, and (emotionally) retrogressive. Only in the simplicity of nature was there health and contentment. A few practical shortcomings in the state admittedly there were, but were we not the sons of Adam? What would you have?

This degree of tolerance arrived at, (noticeably coincident with the appearance of flowers on the earth, the singing of birds, and the voice of the turtle in the land,) life went very pleasantly with Rowe. Direct reformatory zeal was relegated to the winter months; but he still spent an hour or two in privacy most mornings, although he had not his popular addresses to prepare. He had, instead, resumed the

pastoral romance which had, for long, intermittently engaged his attention ; but he spoke to nobody, not even to Barbara, about it. In anything else he was unnecessarily communicative to her, so she thought. She, however, had noticed his altered attitude to the life about him. It seemed to her that, in his robust acquiescence, everything which had proclaimed his method of life an intellectual attitude was being lost, and that, in her eyes, betokened obvious degeneration. She preferred vastly the restless idealist, however extravagant his aspirations, to the unconscious and well-fed optimist into which her friend seemed to her to be developing. His intellectual interests were waning on all hands. All current books and periodicals he had himself for some time ceased

to take. Such as Diall frequently sent to Barbara he would perhaps glance at, only quickly to abandon with an impatient jest. The daily paper he seldom touched. When he did, he dozed over it as speedily as Bezaleel himself. His needs were more and more irresistibly for action, and he ministered unsparingly to his needs.

To his rustic neighbours such development was, of course, only matter for his additional recommendation, and his popularity steadily increased. With the temporary relaxation of ethical consciousness, Rowe's affability towards them was also becoming modified,—the quality of which is as readily detected by rustics as by others claiming a larger share of sophistication. There was no longer that 'austere regard of control' in the presence of a jest

which lacked something of refinement. As often as not the master joined heartily in the laughter which succeeded it, and was not above, occasionally, propounding in a mild way the jest itself.

This development was, of course, the result of a subtle process, and in its course had received, and did still receive, many a resolute check from within. Rowe had by no means yet lost sight of his ideal,—very far from it. An instance of this lay in the present examination of his attitude to Miriam. That recent observation of Limbrick (and possibly Barbara's comment thereupon) had thoroughly aroused him, and he lost no time in acting upon their joint reflections. He had not behaved fairly to Miriam ; it was clear, undeniable. He had only to compare his feelings to-

wards her and towards her sister Eulalie, in order to establish clearly the distinction between the ideal and the practical. His conscience was void of offence towards Eulalie. Her bodily infirmity, perhaps,—her obvious spirituality,—had guarded his manhood in that case; but with Miriam it was different. He would affect no longer to be blind to it. Theory should in that, at least, be—hanged. The whole was admitted,—solely as a pretty and buxom young woman had he allowed himself to trifle with her. If she had a soul, he at least was not aware of it. He had never speculated upon that topic. It was simply as a physical model that she had come to interest him. It should be so no longer. The intellectual he had looked for and found in another direction.

According to his promise to Barbara, he put his resolution in action immediately. The effecting it was not difficult, for the hayfield notoriously affords facilities for casual encounters of an interesting kind, even if you have not the supreme advantage of being master of the movements. The sun rises early in those last June days, and the dew is soon off the open, upland meadows, so by six the following morning all were afield. This was the last they had to carry.

It was very hot, and the cloudless zenith faded away into a steaming haze towards every horizon. The brown hay-cocks scattered about the field threw their shadows upon the bright green sward around them, and the dull patch in the far corner showed where a place still lay

spread for the rakers. All the air was redolent of the fragrant crop.

The waggon rumbled to its place in the meadow to the jingling of the gear. The boy leading the first of the three horses whistled lustily as he went, and others were talking in audible tones. Rowe came on alone behind. When there was a halt he came up to them, and then followed a brief discussion. Bezaleel and the women jumped from the cart, rakes and forks were flung to the ground, and when the labour was apportioned each one took his appropriate weapon. Old Winnett and Miriam went off to the outspread corner, each with a rake in hand; the rest began to load.

When all was in progress, Rowe also withdrew to that far corner with a rake,

and a general grin went the round of those he left behind him; but it was a few seconds before the conversation was opened.

‘Thought as that were the corner for he, David,’ at length remarked the man who was in the waggon.

‘Eess, William, and ’ee thought right, I judges, but I dunno what Luke may think.’ And by degrees they proceeded to discuss their employer and his proclivities.

Miriam, looking round the flap of her white bonnet, had seen him approaching, and she was not surprised. However, he went some little way off and set strenuously to work. It was only the exigencies of duty which at length brought them alongside, then he responded to the glance. She knew that he must have overseen her

interview with Limbrick. Had his eye, indeed, prompted her conduct?

‘Hot already, Miriam?’ for her face seemed a little flushed. ‘You ought not to be. I envy you that bonnet. I think I shall begin to wear one.’

She scarcely laughed at his humour, and continued to draw the rake through the grass mechanically. He watched her action with a momentary pleasure, her trim-fitting print frock fully betraying the gracefulness of her movements.

‘Why did you run away from Luke so quickly yesterday?’ he suddenly said to her; but she gave him no reply.

‘Do you really intend to refuse him, Miriam?’

There was something in his tone which made her look at him.

‘ Yes, sir, I do.’ And there was a brief silence.

‘ Of course, it’s not my business ; but I should have thought it an excellent match for you. I wonder you don’t like him. Somebody else, perhaps, Miriam. Is that it ?’

‘ I don’t know, sir.’

‘ But you must know whether you love anybody else,’ he said, with intentional firmness.

Again she looked at him, and his heart beat more quickly. Not wholly physical this apparently. Her bright eyes rested trustfully upon his face, her lips were closed, and there was an expressive ripple on the brow. ‘ Can *you* ask me ?’ was too obviously the question of the features, and Rowe turned hurriedly away. The girl

had not spoken. Both plied the rake, and the distance was widened between them.

Some minutes later they again approached. This time Miriam felt, if he spoke, that she must weep. He spoke, but she did not weep. In those few minutes Rowe had gained a victory, and his tone was altered. He must not lapse into imbecility.

‘You ought to think of that man,’ he said, curtly,—then paused.

Was not this rather brutal? He raked onwards to think again; but reflection only confirmed his previous resolve. Upon every account he must pursue it. Even the momentary vacillation he could not understand. When they next encountered, Miriam spoke first.

‘ I will think of him, sir ; I am sure I will, if you wish me to.’

‘ It isn’t what I wish ; what on earth has that got to do with the matter ? I only wish what will be good for yourself. Of course, if you hate the man——’

‘ But I don’t hate him, sir. He is a good man. I have no reason to hate him ; but—but I have never loved anybody before.’

‘ Before whom ?’ asked Rowe, from between his teeth, maliciously and in spite of himself.

Miriam stopped with her lips apart.

‘ You don’t know what you’re talking about, Miriam. You are too old to be a child. I am not cross with you, but I want you to see how foolish you have been. Do you understand that ?’

‘Do you think me a brute, then?’ he asked, quietly, as she did not reply.

‘You, sir!’

The expression of her face was such that he could not refrain from laughing aloud. But it was not a genuine laugh, and it left him ill at ease. ‘I am one, all the same,’ he muttered, more audibly than he had intended.

‘Go in, Miriam, when we have done this raking. It will be too hot for you to-day. You are not accustomed to this.’ And again they parted.

Miriam raked on mechanically, unconsciously, and from time to time Rowe glanced at her. But she never saw him do so, for her eyes were always on the ground. Not hay indeed was she raking there, but the lost threads of that indeter-

minate dream, which for some months now had persistently haunted her. Heart and brain were in a state of uncontrollable confusion. To have admitted to herself that she had been or was in love with Rowe, required a faculty for concatenation wholly beyond the capacity of Miriam. She was only conscious of an unquestioning subjection to his smallest wish, utterly regardless of egoistic requirements. Yesterday, it is true, her behaviour had belied such meekness ; but it was an abnormal and momentary outburst, wholly the result of blind instinctive impulse, and of no recognised significance to herself. That other interloper had frustrated a longing of her own, just as it was gathering to the desired fruition, and the check was discomposing. That was all, and it had

long since been abundantly repented.

Rowe, as became his maturer attainments in philosophy, viewed the situation more perceptively, but he failed to gather satisfaction from the survey. This trivial episode had removed the veil from much that had hitherto reposed in acceptable obscurity. Now that clear adjustment was required of him, it was with some consternation and surprise that he found his relative position. Purely physical, on his way to the field, he had adjudged it, but was that all, in this stronger light? Most undisguisedly it irked him to fore-swear his partiality for Miriam,—although, yesterday morning, he would roundly have abused you if you had ventured to hint at the existence of such a partiality at all. Was not he obviously pledged else-

where? And had not he again last night been on the point of making declaration of it when something intangible withstood him, as it invariably did? Not consciously, at any rate, did his theory comprehend the principles of Salt Lake city; and the wider practice of the East had not hitherto found favour with him.

But no, it had not got to this. He was not weighing his preferences in the balance; but merely grappling with a startling whim. Momentarily annoying it must be, to one of such transcendental aspirations, to confess himself so far a man, but he would confess it and have done. It was, at least, a satisfaction that it could be disposed of so uncompromisingly. As regarded Miriam, at any rate, the thing was done; that one other

step, and the whole was accomplished.

During the course of that day, Eulalie paid unusual attention to her sister, and in the afternoon they were alone.

‘What have you been thinking about all day, Miriam?’ asked the younger, who had gone into her sister’s room whilst the latter dressed. ‘You have had something on your mind.’

‘I want to tell you, Lalie.’

Eulalie’s heart leaped, not with joy, but with sheer terror, as she awaited what followed.

‘Wouldn’t you do whatever Mr. Rowe told you to? Anything—anything, I mean?’

‘Yes, anything that he would tell me to do.’

‘That’s what I always feel,’ responded Miriam. ‘He would only tell us what we

really ought to do, I am sure of that. Aren't you quite sure of that, Lalie ?'

Eulalie was superabundantly assured of that fact.

'Does he ever seem cross to you?'

Eulalie pondered. She could see further than her sister, and was now instinctively anticipating the drift of what was to come. She did not think he ever had seemed cross.

'Then he likes you better than me,' asserted Miriam.

This only called forth a strenuous denial,—an ecstatic, bashful, vehement, self-assuring denial.

'But he does, and, of course, he ought to, for you are so pretty, Lalie. Everybody says you are so pretty, and I—I'm not.'

Eulalie, looking at her sister's face in the glass, saw tears fall, and was instantly less ecstatic. She poured forth a torrent of consolatory reflections, positive and negative alike in equal abundance. Emphasizing, exaggerating her sister's amiable qualities ; emphasizing and exaggerating her own defects. Was she conscious of the pacifying conviction which alone enabled her to be so generous ?

But Miriam quickly commanded herself, and proceeded with her confession. Her sister had, of course, already had the details of the previous day's adventure, and, generally, Miriam's attitude to Limbrick was known to her.

‘ He was cross with me because I sent Luke away, and he says I ought to think of him.’

‘I wish you could,’ interposed the other

‘I shall now, Lalie. I know I ought to like him, for he isn’t like other young men, and he is very fond of me. I don’t know what it was that made me so thoughtless. He is very good, isn’t he?’

The two young women, forthwith, between them formulated such a brilliant list of the neglected lover’s virtues, suspected and unsuspected, as must have made the ears of that young man glow inordinately. Indeed, it proved to be such an inexhaustible subject that it was far from completed when the time which they could devote to it was at an end, and they had to go down.

At length, then, Eulalie had got that assurance, and she did not attempt to dis-

guise from herself the depth of its significance to her. Latterly, indeed, it was all that she had craved for, for the re-appearance of Mr. Diall at the farm had, to her penetrating vision, swept away the only other cloud which, with anything like permanency, had been able to make itself seen across the whole breadth of her horizon. Misgivings of a wholly independent nature had, and, indeed, did, occasionally assail her, but almost coincidently some trivial circumstance would come to reassure her too impressible imagination. A casual glance, or it might be an accidental touch, was sufficient to annihilate for her a whole universe of doubt.

With the most unquestionable innocence, Rowe was, on this occasion, the means of absolutely confirming her in this sanguine

mood. Reflection throughout the day strengthened him in the course he had set out upon, and the bright idea of supplementing his own influence by that of Eulalie recommended itself immediately. With this object he permitted himself a few private words with her, a thing which, upon principle, he had not done for a long time. It was during the evening in the yard they met, by the new hay-rick which had been finished that day.

‘Has Miriam said anything to you? I thought it likely. You understood why I spoke to her?’

Eulalie did not, but of course thought she did, thoroughly, and confessed so much.

‘Don’t you think it was the best thing to do? You see——’ And Rowe pointed

out the numerous advantages, theoretical and practical, attending the step.

The girl readily agreed to all of them.

‘Of course,’ Rowe continued, ‘you don’t think Miriam will do anything ridiculous,—I mean, cause herself any unnecessary suffering. She won’t feel forced into anything objectionable to her. Don’t let her be in a hurry. That would be abominable, you know. I can trust you, Eulalie. You would feel pretty much as I should in these things, I expect.’

They talked for a minute or two longer, but it was only these sentences that dwelt in Eulalie’s remembrance.

Limbrick was not long in discovering the result of these secret efforts in his behalf. Miriam did not exactly tell him that it was her duty, thenceforth, to devote her main

energies to the task of ‘thinking favourably of him,’ but she displayed, in her behaviour towards him, a remarkable aptitude for accommodating herself to the will of her instructors. Not more than a week had elapsed before she had gone the length of agreeing to take a twilight walk with Luke. This surely evinced such application to the effort of ‘thinking of him’ as must deserve the warm encomiums of the most exacting of her tormentors.

From Rowe’s observation of his neighbour, it appeared, too, that results were as favourable as mere outward appearances. For one thing, Limbrick’s attitude towards him was radically altered, a consummation, though, which caused the other peculiar irritation. Rowe felt that there was an instinctive antipathy between himself and

this 'boor,' (the theory evidently acknowledged a flaw here,) and he vastly preferred a continuance of the former honest manifestation of it. Certainly, he himself acted up to this, and never allowed himself the slightest modification of the position which he had hitherto assumed.

But, to say truth, now that the affair was adjusted, he thought very little, directly, about it. It had been the means of emphasizing certain considerations, long gathering in his own mind, and like other mere means was lost sight of in the issue. Barbara did not wish to be needlessly alarmed, but, since the night she abruptly ended the conversation about Miriam, she had felt a vague uneasiness, as though complications of no pleasant tendency were hanging over her, and might arise at any

time. So genuine was her discomposure, that she took elaborate precautions for avoiding at present all private intercourse between herself and Rowe, and, as hitherto she had been just as reckless in her abandonment to it, the result was rather obvious. Rowe perceived it instantly, and, though he liked not the augury, it incited him to more resolute action. He could hardly pretend to himself that he had been confidently sanguine at any time, but, now, whatever was to be his fate he must know it.

CHAPTER IX.

D E A D L E A V E S.

FOR some time the old farmer had looked forward to this, as the only logical issue to the unexpected course that his affairs had taken. He was content, more than content,—only felt a little surprise that it had been so long in definitely showing itself. No strong ties bound him to his daughter, for, as he always felt and said, she was not of their kin. She was essentially the child of her mother, and Bezaleel Winnett had not been married long before perceiving

the gulf which separated him from the nurtured instincts of his wife. But like all practical men he was of a positive turn of mind, and had had no sort of doubt as to the side upon which the *right*, to say nothing of the reason, lay. The wife he had from the outset managed, for she was pacific and indefinitely suffering; but the daughter he had always found to be another matter. He had just given her enough of himself to arm her effectually for the contest, with the result that as between them it had never progressed beyond the stage of 'drawn.' But he had grown accustomed to her, and age, by action on the vital forces, was enabling him to extend a greater degree of tolerance to antipathetic influences. It was, therefore, with something approaching

satisfaction that he had discerned Rowe's inclinations. Having got the farm, he might just as well have the —— stock. It seemed the fit and proper thing. Barbara was not the sort of wife that he himself—at any rate, a second time—should choose; but Rowe was an original, and she would suit him well enough.

Having confirmed this discovery, it was in accordance with Bezaleel's character to be ostentatiously facetious about it. But for him, indeed, Barbara might have hoodwinked herself much longer, and indefinitely have postponed the issue. Thrust upon her as it was, she in the course of a week or two resolved that the inevitable must be confronted and the consequences made the best of. Thus it was that she came to abandon her elusive tactics.

Nor was it only Barbara herself that the old man influenced by his raillery. He encountered Eulalie one day when in this jocular mood. He always evinced a fondness for the cripple, and often cracked a joke with her.

‘Now, maidie,’ he cried out, on this occasion, ‘what ’st a-studying about? ’Ee look as solid as old time. ’St thinking o’ being a bridesmaid, eh?’

Eulalie not unnaturally applied the joke in her own manner.

‘But Miriam won’t be married for a long time,’ she said, laughing.

‘Slike her won’t; but what if somebody else be? I do believe women be as blind as ’oonts.’

‘Is Miss Barbara going to be married?’ she then asked, in greatest astonishment.

Bezaleel laughed extravagantly.

‘That be more like the item, Lalie.’

‘Is she really? Is she going away from here? She can’t be, Master Winnett?’

‘What i’ the name ’st want her to go away for? Beunt there nobody hereabout for her to marry?’

‘Nobody that’s worth such as she is,’ asserted the other, confidently.

‘Well, dash me, you women be a nation proud bargain! Who be worth the maid, then, I’d like to know?’

‘Some clever man that would——’

‘Beunt some o’ we clever, then?’ asked Winnett, indignantly. ‘What be cleverness if preaching like the parson,—nay, damme, that wouldn’t be a deal,—preaching a vast better than the parson; reading a mort o’ books, and writing of ’em too, for

a matter o' that? What do you want for cleverness if this don't satisfy 'ee?'

'There is only one that can do that,' said Eulalie, quietly,—glad, defiant assurance glistening in her eyes, nevertheless.

'Well, can 'ee marry more than one at a time?'

Her look changed instantly, and she stared into the old man's face.

'Is Miss Barbara going to marry the one?'

Eulalie looked at him aghast,—he thought it surprise, roared with laughter at the effect of his joke, and went off.

But, the moment after, Eulalie too laughed. What a tease the old fellow was! She was worth him,—yes, a thousand times more worthy of him than the one he had crowned by his choice, but—

that was not a thought to be trifled with. Life may, with comparative ease, be laid down for another, but love—never.

Eulalie was somewhat surprised that Bezaleel's joke had such power to recur to her, and strangely not always to be laughed at. Appearances, she had always known, might have prompted disturbing tremors, but she had so amply provided for them that they had no longer power to sting. The old farmer, with less comprehensive knowledge, had naturally mistaken them. No other explanation was possible. This one, therefore, was impressed and re-impressed upon herself,—with needless iteration, surely, if so abundantly conclusive.

From day to day this assurance was re-asserted, with the additional force and

conclusiveness necessitated by close and disquieting observation. Eulalie had never watched so desperately, with the consequence that she had never obtained so much in return for her watching. The whole of her delicate frame would tremble at a look which she might see bestowed by Rowe upon Barbara. It ought to have been reserved for her,—nobody else had a right to it. Once he almost overturned her (begging her pardon, certainly), in what seemed a hot pursuit of Barbara. What was the meaning of it all? Nay, did he now so much as even look at *her*? A month ago it would not have been noticeable, explained away so easily; but now it was fraught with dire significance. Could the assurance be possibly beginning to fail her?

At length a day arrived upon which she was to know more definitely. The County Agricultural Show was to be held some way off, and Rowe had compelled Barbara to promise to accompany himself and her father to the place. They were to stay a night away. On the morning of their departure, Rowe was radiant and noisy; Eulalie observant. Twice he had hurried past her, doubtless in complete ignorance of her existence. She noted his anxiety to attend upon Barbara. Had she got this? She must take that. When they were ready to drive away, Eulalie, standing there to see it and draw deductions, was dispatched by Rowe for an umbrella he had forgotten! She brought it, received neither word nor look from him, and away they went.

Shortly thereafter, Eulalie was in her room weeping.

The following afternoon they returned. It was excessively hot, and nobody seemed in the best of humours. After they had had a meal, Barbara went out into the garden, and Rowe, having given some instructions to Bezaleel for the men, followed her. Eulalie just noted the movements, and then withdrew to speculate. She was not in a mood to show herself at present. She wondered what had happened during that momentous absence.

The expedition had not given Rowe complete satisfaction; that is, it had fallen short of the hopes which he had set forth to realise. Barbara, he admitted, had not been wanting. Her behaviour to him had reassured him disproportionately. It was

simply circumstances that had been against them.

After their arrival at home, whilst waiting for the old man to join them at the table, Rowe had appeared ill-at-ease. Barbara had noted his condition for the last two days, and, seeing that all common methods of repulse had failed her, she was anxious for the pitched battle to bring the situation to an end. When Bezaleel's step was audible, Rowe stepped beside her, but turned away again, and went to his chair.

‘Will you come into the garden afterwards?’ said Barbara, quietly.

Rowe readily assented, but he was under a delusion no longer. He ate no dinner, naturally.

It was a blazing summer day, tempered

by a north-west breeze, and the flies buzzed incessantly around Barbara as she was sitting on the bench beneath the apple-tree. She herself was calm and collected enough. Disclaiming any jot of responsibility for the crisis which was upon them, she was able to approach it with dispassionate resolution. She would rather have avoided it, certainly, out of consideration for everybody involved; but, since it proved inevitable, it only behoved her to make the best of the situation. Rowe sauntered up to her, his countenance the only dark and gloomy object in nature, and he took a seat there. Then his eye travelled down the garden-path to a low wall at the extremity, and, going beyond it, rested upon a silvery sea of full-grown beans which the wind was rippling fitfully.

‘ You have brought me here for execution, Miss Winnett,’ he said, with an attempted smile, but without moving his eyes. ‘ I beg you to stay your hand. Let us leave it all a little longer.’

‘ That would only be unpardonable dissimulation—on my part, at any rate. We will dispose of it forthwith. I only wish you to release me from my position in your household, Mr. Rowe.’

‘ It is impossible,’ he cried, vehemently.

‘ So far from that,’ replied Barbara, ‘ that it is the only simple and possible course. You know that I have long looked forward to it. It can now be accomplished without inconvenience to anyone.’

‘ Inconvenience !’ he cried, with a laugh. ‘ Ay, that’s the word ! If only as a friend, don’t mock me, Barbara.’

‘That, at least, you know is beyond me. I should only mock you by remaining.’

‘But I can’t stay here without you. Inconvenience! Your presence is essential to—not to my convenience!—to my very being. I was sinewless, purposeless, until I met you. You think me so still. Yes, to what I shall be, I am; but I am awakening. Only grant me your influence, and you shall have no cause to despise me.’

‘I wanted to avoid this,’ she replied, perhaps harshly. ‘I am not young, Mr. Rowe, and, as you know, not emotional. I positively dislike scenes like this.’

‘But you are a woman,’ he exclaimed. ‘I will never believe that you are less than that. A man’s love cannot be merely despicable to you. Mine may be, now;

but allow me only a short time. I am not of a nature incapable of modification. I am constantly developing. Do not think me pledged to the ideals with which I came to you. I do not now look to becoming a pastoral recluse. I already long again for wider influences.'

He spoke so volubly that, short of positive interruption, Barbara could not interpose a word. She simply sat resignedly, with her calm gaze fixed upon the dapple cloud which variegated the western sky, and lulled by the swaying notes of a couple of chiff-chaffs in the trees about her.

'Nothing so good is despicable to me,' she said, when he allowed her to do so; 'but, when my attitude has been so clearly displayed, am I unreasonable in thinking that it ought to be respected?'

Rowe evidently was not in a mood for taking umbrage.

‘Respected!’ he said, lightly. ‘Do I not show the greatest respect to it by determining to undermine it? Could I ever presume that I was worthy to obtain your love without difficulty? You underestimate your value, Miss Winnett, if you think that mere attitude can influence a suitor, above all at the outset.’

‘May I ask, then, in what way I can give you the fullest assurance?’

‘In no way for several months to come,’ replied he.

‘But I wish to be released immediately. My position here from this moment is intolerable to me.’

‘No, no, it shall not be. Do you think I am one that could annoy you? Is

your opinion of me so slight as that?’

‘Mr. Rowe, this is unreasonable. Why should you calculate so confidently upon time assisting you? At my age, an impression of this sort is likely to be lasting.’

‘And your impression is unfavourable? Do you so hate me?’

‘There is a middle course possible. I have a considerable regard for you.’

‘Then why should it not develop into something more considerable still?’

‘There is a limit to the powers of development. This apple-tree, for instance, doesn’t develop into a fig-tree.’

‘Is that then the degree of relationship between regard and affection?’ he asked, with a smile, looking beyond to the silvery bean-field.

‘Less than that,’ she said, rising from her seat.

‘But, Miss Winnett,’ he cried, plaintively, ‘supposing your departure were possible, may I ask what your farther plans would be?’

‘Not quite determinate as yet; but I should get employment of some sort. I have long aimed at it.’

‘Yes, but an indefinite aim is different from an absolute requirement. Are you sure that you could do so? Anything, of course, I mean, in the remotest degree worthy of you.’

‘I am not very fastidious,’ she said, more pleasantly, moving a step or two along the pathway. He remained seated.

‘I think you ought to be. It is a villainous world.’

‘ Oh, I am cautious enough,’ she cried, still one more gooseberry bush between them, and, as he said no more, Barbara withdrew towards the house.

Rowe sat there still, for the most part apparently engaged in warfare with the flies, and in interjectional soliloquy. He was not likely to misconstrue the young lady’s attitude, and, as she herself said, she was no longer young. The outlook was hopeless, only now did he perceive how desperately he desired her. It was her strength that fascinated him,—it was really this which he coveted in her, coveted for a personal possession daily to feed and grow upon. She had made him suspicious of himself, nay, in some moods actually disdainful of himself, and he imagined that she alone could restore his self-complac-

ency. So firmly had he come to regard her personality as a vital factor in his life's progress that the thought of its removal crippled him. Presently he flung himself from the seat, and running down the path took the garden-wall at a flying leap. Then he sauntered away to examine his crops.

Eulalie had watched all this, and drawn conclusions. Since that flood of tears upon their departure two days ago, she had mastered her emotions. The mad delusion which she had been hugging was now apparent, and with one passionate snap she had reduced her heart to the dead tuneless laxity which the discovery necessitated. For six months of her life she had lived amply, but it had now ended. Not merely did she relapse to the old sub-

missive calm of the former time at the Downs. Merciful enough would such relapse have been to her. Her fall was far lower. Her calmness, the calmness rather of death, than of such living repose. Her face bespoke the change in her, if anybody had observed it.

From her point of observation, when Eulalie had seen Rowe leap the wall, she withdrew upstairs. Her infirmity disabled her from going noiselessly, and as she passed along the landing a door opened.

‘Come in here, Lalie,’ said Miriam, and the lame girl turned inwards. She sat upon the edge of the bed. ‘Whatever be the matter with you?’ cried Miriam, in consternation. ‘You be as white as the duck.’

The other smiled, and reassured her sister.

‘ I am all right. It is for thunder, I think. I do feel the heat so.’

‘ So do I,—but are you going to faint?’

‘ No, no. If I do, don’t call anyone, Miriam. They would make such a fuss. Just give me a drop of water.’

This was done, and the girl felt better.

‘ Do you know I’ve accepted him, Lalie?’ said Miriam, presently, from her place before the glass.

‘ Luke? Are you really engaged to him?’

‘ Yes, I said I would marry him; but don’t you tell anyone. He doesn’t want it to be just yet; he wants to buy a pony first. He says he can do so much better for us if he has a pony and cart.’

‘ Of course,’ assented Eulalie, faintly.

‘ And what do you think, Lalie? Do

you feel worse now? You do look so bad. Lie down a bit.'

'I'm all right. What were you going to say?'

'Do you know, Lalie . . . after all . . . they say that *he* is in love with Miss Barbara? They're sitting in the garden together now, and have been for half-an-hour. I believe they have made it up at the Show.'

'Have they?'

'I never thought of such a thing—whoever would? Of course, he's good enough for her——'

Miriam was busy at the glass, and ran on garrulously about this new and highly important discovery of hers, regardless of her sister. She put many of her remarks interrogatively, but did not wait for, did

not expect, answers. Eulalie heard the flow of words vaguely at first, but in a few minutes ceased to hear them. The girl's crutch fell to the floor, Miriam turned round, and saw that her sister had fallen backwards upon the bed. A little scream was inevitable to Miriam, but she called nobody. She laid Eulalie quickly in the middle of the bed, and did such necessary things as come instinctively to a woman in such cases. Perhaps she was unnecessarily lavish with the water, but with satisfying effect, for Eulalie's eyes were soon reopened. Then Miriam overwhelmed her with passionate caresses, with a flood of childish tears of endearment, and ultimately herself wept copiously.

'I am all right again now, Miriam,' said the other, becoming comforter in her turn.

‘Do sit up, darling. Don’t let anybody see us. It is only the heat. You know it always makes me poorly . . .’

Between them, calm was at length restored, and Miriam proceeded once more with her dressing. The incident had alarmed her, but upon her sister’s repeated entreaties she promised to keep it secret. Her conversation became less voluble, and from time to time she came up beside Eulalie to reassure herself.

‘Don’t stay, Miriam. I shall lie down a little, and shall soon be as well as ever again. But I will go into my own room.’

Miriam helped her up, since she could not persuade her to remain where she was, and they went into the next room together.

Eulalie had been lying there a short

time, hearing only the twittering of swallows down the chimney and the buzz of a wasp on the window-pane, when she raised herself and leaned upon her elbow. There was no other sound,—no movement in the house being audible. Presently she scrambled from the bed, placed her hand to her forehead for an instant, and then limped across the floor. From beneath the clothes in that bottom drawer she brought out the Cadbury's chocolate box, and opened it on the floor. The crisp green laurel wreath was quickly drawn out, and, without a moment's pause, Eulalie began to snip thread after thread with a pair of scissors which she had taken from her pocket. Each leaf, as it was detached, fell with a rustling sound into the box,—a dull, soft note which seemed a knell in the girl's ear.

The crown grew less and less, but Eulalie did not pause. Her face was of one expressionless pallor, bending over her task with, as it seemed, an entire absence of interest. Absence even of emotion one might easily have fancied, and in all likelihood it was so. There was no longer the shape of a crown; but a few dry leaves strung together by a thread. Snip—drop; snip—drop. Two only now hung together; snip went the scissors, and her hands were empty. Then Eulalie did pause; paused and let her fingers play idly amongst the heap of dry rustling leaves. But her face made no response, and after a few seconds the rustling ceased. Eulalie considered. Next she found her pocket, took up the leaves in handfuls and thrust them in, all, not a leaf

remained. Not even a fragment, for two or three chips which had broken off in the process were carefully picked up and placed inside the pocket.

After bathing her face and tidying herself generally, Eulalie went down. Her head ached and throbbed insufferably, but when she reached the sunlight she felt it better. She had escaped without observation. Through the yard she went, and the orchard, to the meadow beyond. The corner of this she crossed, descending to a shaded hedgerow. Here a brook appeared, flowing silently beneath the briars. She approached the hedge, at the point where the cattle drank, taking the well-trodden steps which the roots of the overshadowing ash-tree formed there. There, handful after handful, she flung her leaves and

watched the current bear them from her. Two or three clung to the bank, but with a stick she launched them, and turned away. Then she recrossed the sunlit meadow.

‘What are you doing, Lalie?’ asked Miriam, meeting her half-way over.

‘Nothing,’ she said. ‘I feel better out here.’

CHAPTER X.

D I A L L M O V E S .

THE letter conveying the piece of news to Diall was brief and to the point. Barbara wrote thus :

‘ MY DEAR ROGER,

‘ It is with some dismay that I have to inform you that the impossible *has* happened. This unfortunate man Rowe has not only fallen in love with me, but has proclaimed the fact in unmistakable language—to myself. This is ob-

viously rather awkward. But fortunately I am no longer indispensable to the scheme, and father seems firmly re-established in health, so that I feel able at last to carry out a little scheme of my own. I have made bold to write to Lady —— with sundry questions on the subject of woman's employment. She knows perhaps as much as anybody about it, and will, as we know, do for me what she is able. You shall at once know of the upshot. Rowe is naturally *in extremis*, but it is thought that he will survive.

‘ Always your

‘ BARBARA.’

It happened that this letter arrived just as Diall was issuing from his doorway the following morning. The postman gave it

him, and clattered down the stone steps in his hob-nailed boots rapidly. Roger tore open the envelope, and descended at more leisure. In re-ascending, however, he took two steps at a time. The latch-key would not go in, and he got impatient. When at length he had got a sheet of note-paper, the pen scratched and spluttered, but the following was in a few minutes fairly legible :

‘ Poor man ! I have behaved barbarously to him. I will write to him immediately. You had better come here to-morrow. But no, I suppose that won’t do. You are a supreme humourist, you rogue. I know far more upon the subject of woman’s employment than Lady —— can do, and, what is more, have a

prior claim upon your services. As by providential arrangement, I have but just quarrelled with my charwoman. Let me know the earliest day that I can fetch you, and I will have every arrangement made. Write at once and apologise to Lady ——. I will write more fully to-night.

‘ Yours,

‘ R. D.’

After fastening this up, Diall got a cash-box from a cupboard, and took out a five-pound note. Then once more he issued from the doorway, and descended the innumerable steps at an unwonted pace. As a rule, he walked to Fetter Lane, for the benefit of the exercise, but now he hailed a ’bus. He was in a mood for the irregular.

Once at his destination, he referred immediately to Whitaker's almanac. The index led him to the article entitled 'Registration of Births and Deaths, and other useful Information.' From what was presumably the useful information portion of it, he noted in his mind,—hours 10 to 4, Faculty Office, Doctors' Commons. At about noon he went abroad.

Diall found no difficulty in accomplishing his object. He was, indeed, amazed at the ease of the thing, having always had a vague sense of impenetrable brushwood encircling such enterprise. Londoner though he could now claim to be, the discovery of the Faculty Office was the most difficult part of his scheme. Once found, he soon faced the supercilious clerks; afforded the very moderate amount

of information they demanded ; and accompanied one of them, with a light heart and determined countenance, to take sundry oaths before what, no doubt erroneously, he supposed to be a very high church dignitary, but who was plain enough to look at, when he had lowered the *Times* and become visible, who puffed and groaned a good deal over his irksome duties, and who apparently suffered from gout, for he reclined upon a wicker couch throughout the process, and made movements painfully. A short time afterwards, Diall bore away triumphantly the magic parchment, with its big, wet, pulpy seal, before which even Mrs. Grundy must make a brisk retreat.

The next few days were days of exceptional perturbation, not only to Diall but

to sundry inmates of the Pool Farm. The blow to the susceptible Rowe was a genuinely severe one, and, to one of his temperament, seemed to portend the annihilation of all prospective interest in this temporal life. He went about his duties speculating only how he might briefly and conclusively wind up his affairs. Despite apparent incongruity to an onlooker, he only now fully discovered how inextricably Barbara was interwoven with his ideal projects. All that he had done, it seemed now, he had done for her. She withdrawn, projects became dim. He had bought the place to consummate her wishes; had philosophized solely to convince her of his philosophy; had—oh, how many things in heaven and earth? And now at last he was to discover that she had only

laughed at him in her sleeve. Her open laughter and almost derisive criticism, at all times surely with no reserve displayed to him, had had no weight, or at least possessed none now.

‘Miss Winnett, is this final?’ he had asked, in the time which elapsed before the arrival of the despatches from Chelsea.

‘Do not let us renew it,’ she replied. ‘I see that I have been grievously to blame; but, Mr. Rowe, could average human intelligence have foreseen it? We are radically opposed upon every——’

‘We are not; we are not.’

Barbara raised her finger.

‘—upon every feature of life; an opposition which I have done my best to emphasize. I congratulated myself upon being so very far from your ideal that merely ordi-

nary conventional scruples have never waylaid me. My efforts to free myself from an uncongenial phase of life have been freely exposed to you; from a phase of life to which you deliberately dedicate yourself. Could I suspect that you would choose me of all people to share it with you?’

‘But you are mistaken. My plans are vastly modified. I shall not for ever be a farmer. We are not so far apart.’

‘Plans and idiosyncrasies!’ said Barbara, with some dignity. ‘These don’t affect the situation, Mr. Rowe. Know finally, that there are everlasting obstacles in the way of your wishes. We are no longer children. Let us have done with it, and be friends.’

‘Pardon me, then, one final piece of impertinence; your heart is already given?’

‘It is.’ And she turned away.

‘To Roger Diall?’ he exclaimed, impulsively; but she vanished, for Miriam was just upon them.

The new-comer looked alarmed, and was about to flee, when a gesture of Rowe’s detained her. He drew her into the laundry, by the door of which he and Barbara had been standing. Something in Miriam’s face apprised Rowe that she had gathered the drift of the conversation in which he had been engaged.

‘Is it Diall?’ he asked of her, fiercely, —all in an instant enraged at his folly that had blinded him to the course of making inquiries earlier on the subject.

‘Yes, sir. It used to be.’

‘What used to be? How do *you* know what I am talking about?’

Miriam shrank backwards, for he looked so angry. Let her shrink ; he was at war with the whole world. He repeated his brutal inquiry.

‘ Tell me, how do *you* know anything about it ?’

‘ I don’t know, sir. I guessed, I suppose. Miss Barbara used to be engaged to Mr. Diall.’

‘ Used to be ; then isn’t he now ?’

‘ Nobody knows.’

‘ Everybody knows except me, and I’m a d——d fool.’

This was a lapse into pastoral language, occasional with Rowe just now. He turned towards the door as if to go, and she went to some duty at the table ; but he re-faced her, then walked up to her.

‘ I wasn’t angry with you, Miriam,’ he

said, in an altered tone. ‘I was put out about something. You haven’t seen that fellow, I suppose?’ Her eyes made mute inquiry. ‘Don’t *you* irritate me. You know who I mean.’

She now lowered her gaze before his.

‘Yes, sir. I am engaged to Luke.’

‘Engaged to him! Bah, save us from women!’

He turned on his heel, and finally left the room. Miriam interlaced the fingers of her two hands, and let them fall against her apron,—in that attitude she gazed at the starched linen on the table.

Thus Rowe was prepared for his friend’s letter. On the day that it arrived, he calmly announced, during dinner, his intention of visiting his uncle in Northum-

berland for a week or two. Barbara silently assented ; Winnett, in complete ignorance of anything extraordinary in the situation, guaranteed that everything should go right in his absence, and proceeded to question Rowe upon the state of agriculture and sheep-breeding in those northern latitudes. The latter immediately entered upon a brilliant disquisition on Border Leicesters, Cheviots, and other equally abstruse technicalities which enthralled Bezaleel until the conclusion of the meal. As they rose from the table, the eyes of Barbara and Rowe met, and there was a peculiar glow of triumph in the latter. Throughout the ensuing days, neither of them sought a confidential interview with the other, and, to their mutual satisfaction, chance did not in

sportive malice thrust any such upon them. They parted as friends, both perfectly well aware that the parting was for a long and indefinite period. So Rowe took his departure for the north.

Not until she was free from Rowe's presence could Barbara adequately ponder the situation. She had gone about with a vague sense of momentous issues confronting her, of vital responsibilities to be assumed; but what shape her own tactics were to take in the contest she had been unable to formulate into any definite conception. She had accepted all responsibility for a clear thoroughfare at her end, — nay, had resolutely demanded it. Diall's proffered aid had been summarily rejected, and she had stipulated for an entirely free hand in whatever was required to be done.

Both, of course, fully understood that the manipulation of the old farmer was referred to. Other mere mercantile details, Barbara gladly enough left to her superior.

The footing which existed between father and daughter has been sufficiently indicated in the course of this narrative, and Barbara will be acquitted of anything like unfilial indifference in entertaining any project which involved domiciliary separation between them. So long as the old *régime* had subsisted, neither she nor Diall would have thought of it. It was indeed the unhesitating acceptance of this interdependence that had inflicted their former measure of heroism upon them. With Barbara's labours so clearly determined, and Diall's income diminished by

one half to sustain them, what other than heroism was open to them ?

All this, recent circumstances seemed to have altered. By Rowe's generosity the old man's position was made certain, nor by any means was it founded upon conditions that were eleemosynary. Bezaleel's experience, when guided and curbed by financial security, was an adequate exchange for such remuneration as he was in receipt of. If sentimental interdependence seemed to have been lost sight of, it was only because unreasoning cant alone could have found it place. The old man's recent illness had resolved that, if anybody had been before in any doubt of it. Barbara's approach was the only one which then caused him serious irritation, and the doctor had forbidden her personal at-

tendance upon the patient. In his days of health, he never pretended to extend to her any consideration.

The days crept stealthily on, and still the coveted opportunity had not been presented; or was it that Barbara had not felt the courage for its recognition? There were now but three days before the moment appointed, although appointed for *what* was not clearly determinate, that was left for circumstances to decide. Barbara had not laid her plans like another woman; and, if anything of her woman's nature remained to her, she may have thought with mixed reflections of this too appropriate conclusion to the uneasy current of her romance. Her hand she had definitely promised, and from that she would in no wise draw back; but, as

at present resolved, that did not necessarily include immediate change of locality, for instance. How much it did include she was nevertheless anxious to know, and the only way to a conclusion, she was well aware, lay through that conversation with her father. The day had at length arrived for it to take place.

It chanced when Bezaleel had come in for his eleven o'clock cider. Barbara was aware, by some curious psychical impression, that the moment had come, and contrary to her wont she followed her father into the parlour. The old man sat in his white shirt-sleeves and wiped the perspiration from his forehead, before he took a bite of bread. As soon as he had taken such bite, he remarked,

‘ I feel all on end, as you might say,

without Mr. Rowe. Couldn't ha' thought as the man should ha' made such a difference. Curious affair, uncommon curious.'

Barbara was pretending occupation amongst the music-books in the corner, and made no answer.

'Barbara, how old be you?' he next exclaimed, his mouth again full.

'Twenty-nine, father.'

'Twenty-nine, is it? Well, well.'

Then the old man seemed to contemplate some problem working in his brain. Barbara could not longer shirk the fact that the opportunity had been offered her.

'Is it more or less than you had thought?'

'More, a deal. I've lost count o' time

somehow o' late years; or it have lost count of I more likely, mebbe. Twenty-nine . . .' he mused. 'Your mother was but twenty-four when I married her. Better ha' left her alone, I doubt; she never took to the life, never took to it.'

'Do you ever wish to see me married, father?'

'Iss, iss, my maid, why not? There be——'

'But you know the only one I ever should marry,' she quickly interposed.

'What! . . . But I see——'

Bezaleel paused, scratched his head, and took a draught of cider.

'Would you be willing to see that?'

Still a pause.

Barbara's eyes were now upon him, but he evaded them. Her tone he had not

mistaken, and it for ever dispelled his dream. We must nevertheless give the shattered old man the credit of this one heroic moment, probably the only one throughout the whole of his indifferent career. Most probably never until now had he known the sensation of grappling with an overbearing impulse of his own. His face betrayed the contest,—too tragic for humour or even for pathos. Better, a thousand times better, that old unreasoning force, animal though it were. It at least proclaimed the man, but this only the ruins of a man. The perspiration stood out afresh. For a moment, positive anguish was depicted there, the eyebrows gathered to a point; but only for a moment. That ineffectual display of strength speedily collapsed, and weakness triumph-

ed,—significant of much. His daughter with pain perceived it. She would rather he had fought her to the end.

‘Married to *him*, father?’

‘Ay, why not? When we get to this we be little better than pease haulm, —threshed out, Barbara, clean threshed out. I’ve had my day. You’ll do what you like, I count. It be your turn now.’

‘Would you see Roger Diall, then, if he came here?’

‘I won’t say what I med do.’

This was said hurriedly, shame-facedly, with such a degree of obvious agitation that Barbara at once checked herself and left the room. She had but just gone when Bezaleel instantly fell asleep, overcome by sheer nervous exhaustion.

Wednesday night Diall was to arrive; it was now tea-time, and the fact had not yet been communicated to the old farmer. As they both rose from the table, Barbara spoke.

‘ You remember our talk the other day, father ?’

‘ About *he* ?’ he said, starting round.

‘ Yes. Tell me truly, quite truly, whether you would rather see him or not if he was ever in the neighbourhood.’

Barbara felt positive guilt in her behaviour, but her woman’s nature urged her to it. She was not one to attach abstract moral value to the mere accomplishment of reconciliation. She might even have failed utterly to perceive virtue in it. But this case was peculiar. The ignobility of her father’s attitude shamed her, and she could

not wholly throw off the natural weakness inspired by the prospect of complete estrangement from him,—such estrangement as she felt in his mind must inevitably follow her marriage to a man so exiled from his sympathies as was Roger Diall. This alone gave her the requisite courage so to torture the old fellow.

‘ See him ? Yes, I’ll see him if it ’ull please you.’

Nothing more definite was disclosed to him, although a few more words were exchanged between them. Later in the evening, Bezaleel was alone in the twilight, dozing in his arm-chair. His daughter’s sudden entrance aroused him. It was too dusky for her to see his face, but his movement she had noticed.

‘ Play me a polka, Barbara,’ he exclaimed, with startling suddenness.

Could she have heard aright? Yes, doubtless, for the incident in the hay-field recurred to her. She sat down instantly, and played him a popular air. In a minute or two one of the girls brought a lighted lamp to the room, but she nearly dropped it at an angry injunction to withdraw. Barbara played, and the objects in the room sank into a still deeper obscurity. Presently Bezaleel arose, thanked her, and called for his supper. They partook of the meal in silence, and as usual he went off to bed.

Barbara mused as she heard the old staircase creak under her father’s shuffling step, and as she heard also that he

was distinctly humming that tune. On the landing he paused,—she was standing in the doorway below to listen,—then on again, and his door closed. Without any reason, Barbara still retained her position of reflection, and scarce a minute had elapsed before she heard the door above reopened. The bannisters creaked, and she knew that her father was leaning over them,—and, looking up, she saw his grizzled old face in the candle-light.

‘Be Diall a-coming to-night, Barbara?’
he called out.

‘Yes, father.’

‘Then I’ll see him in the morning.
Good-night, maidie.’

‘Good-night.’

Then Barbara went in, lighter at heart for his having used that word to her.

A strange old man, she thought him.

There had been rain in the evening, but it was a clear moonless night when Barbara drove to the station, and the country was peculiarly fragrant. The conditions proved unusually exhilarating to her, and when she reached her destination she felt positively jubilant. Everything was proceeding with such unheard-of satisfactoriness. Who shall say what high thoughts surged through her brain as she was pacing the platform of that insignificant little station? She herself insignificant enough too, no doubt, upon the world's estimate of her, but evolving her destiny, for all that, and that a destiny to which those of more significant millions might in some light have appeared but dust and ashes in

comparison. But a whistle was heard, and brain was checked by heart-throbs. The train came in indolently. She alone to receive it; he alone to alight from it. But the locomotive was justified if it had done no more than annihilate distance between these two.

Barbara's mood was infectious, and Diall proved also jubilant.

‘Poor old man, we have an ignoble triumph. Have I to see him to-night?’

His companion proceeded to unfold her arrangements, in which Roger saw unmistakable genius.

‘It would be cruel to exact too much,’ she said. ‘He knows nothing of the enterprise. He rises later now, is never about before half-past seven,—perhaps, for once, we can manage to outstrip that. We

can have an early stroll to the wood, and be at the church about eight. I will leave a message to prepare him, and upon our return we shall confess. This seems the simplest method. Obviously he must take no part in it.'

'No, no, of course not. Your plans are admirable. And what about after?'

'You must return to-morrow?'

'Inevitably.'

'Then you must return alone. I cannot leave until Rowe comes back. I have a letter from him to-day, with a sumptuous present. He seems restless on these moorlands, and, as you will see, is already anxious to return here. You can write and tell him to come at any time. When he arrives, I journey to—Chelsea, I suppose.'

And for some time there was silence.

It seemed to Diall, as they entered the fragrant farm-yard, that quite a peculiar stillness and solemnity brooded over the old homestead. As he put the pony into the stable, he heard that favourite solitary pine whispering to the night-breezes, but other sound there was none. He regarded the various objects in silhouette which rose around, and just gave a merciful thought to the defeated old Philistine sleeping soundly in his bed, dreaming inextinguishable anathemas against himself and his devices ; then he entered the house.

Miriam had been kept up for them, but upon her arrival Barbara had dispatched her. When Diall entered, the latter alone was awaiting him, and there seemed a quietude reigning throughout the house as intense as that which had so impressed

him without. The peculiar conditions under which he had come here, the vital issues which his visit was to celebrate, all combined to affect him in a manner hitherto unknown to him. Their conversation was carried on in an undertone, so anxious were they to avoid the risk of disturbing the slumbers of their victim. There was very much to talk about, and naturally amongst the foremost came the attitude of the unfortunate Rowe. In opening the subject, Barbara handed the following letter to Dially:

‘Yardhope Vicarage, Northumberland.

‘MY DEAR MISS WINNETT,

‘There is virtue in this northern air, at any rate for the resuscitation of ideals. I promised at your request

to let you know of my decision, and, as this appears to be the only method of doing so, I presume that I write without increasing the weight of my offences. To be brief, then, I am anxious to get back to my work at Murcott, social and material. From this distance I can perceive sundry flaws in past tactics, and have consequently from the breezy solitude of mountain cairns (although, even here, it is insufferably hot) overhauled my plans. With the results I will not now assail you. When I left, you spoke of expedition,—these, then, are to advertise you that my movements attend on yours and Diall's. I am ready to return at any time.

‘I hope I do no wrong in asking your acceptance of the parcel which will reach you by rail in a day or two. It is ad-

dressed to Knapstone station, for, as that is on the main line, I thought it might get there more expeditiously. My very kind regards to Winnett and Diall.

‘Yours very truly,

‘EDMUND ROWE.’

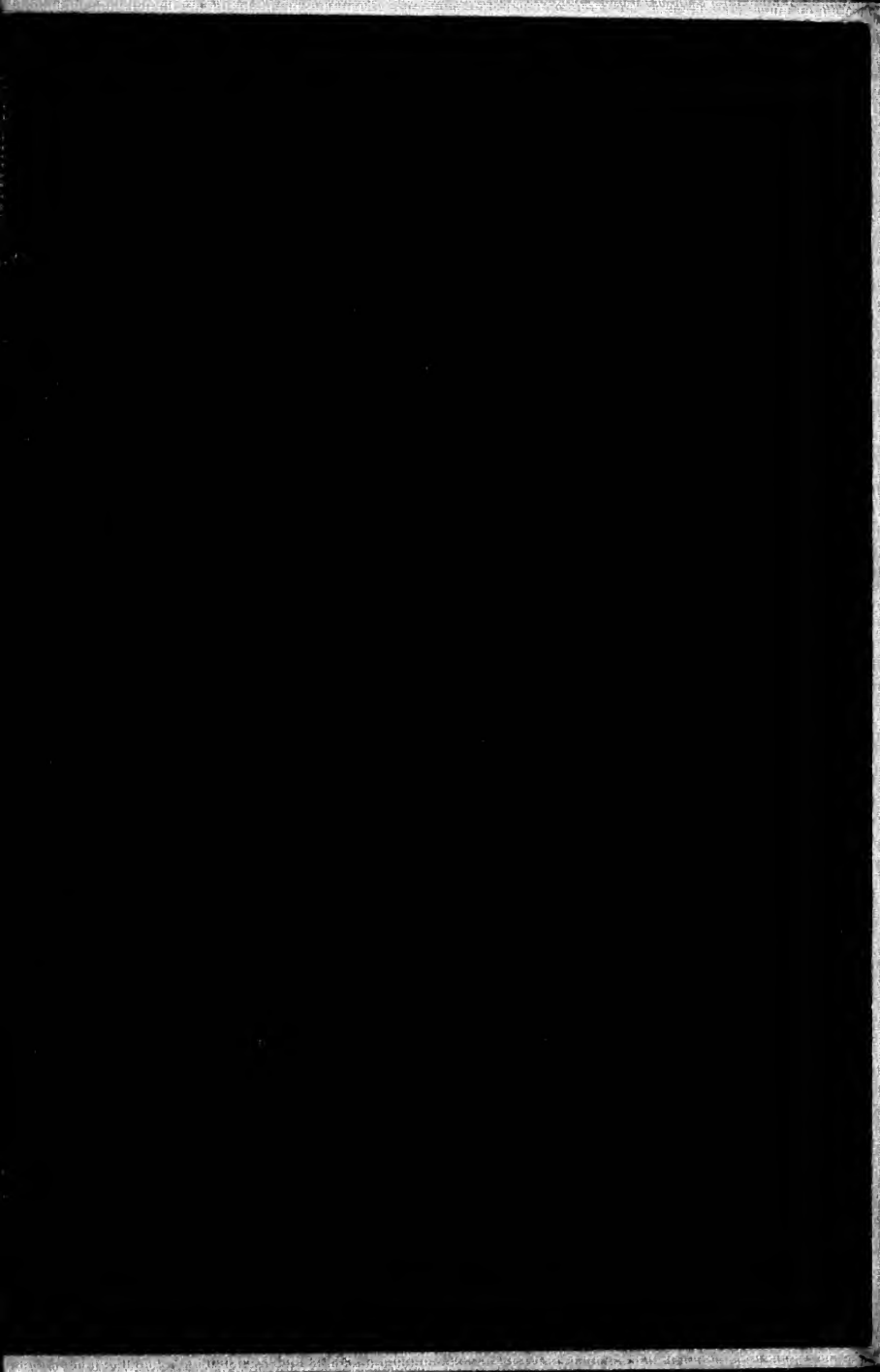
Diall read it, and handed it back.

‘Yes, I am grossly to blame here ; but I wish he had omitted the word “social.”’

‘So did I,’ said Barbara ; and laughed.

And they talked on, always in the same subdued tone. When they were willing to separate, they crept stealthily to their chambers, and the house found unbroken rest.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.



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